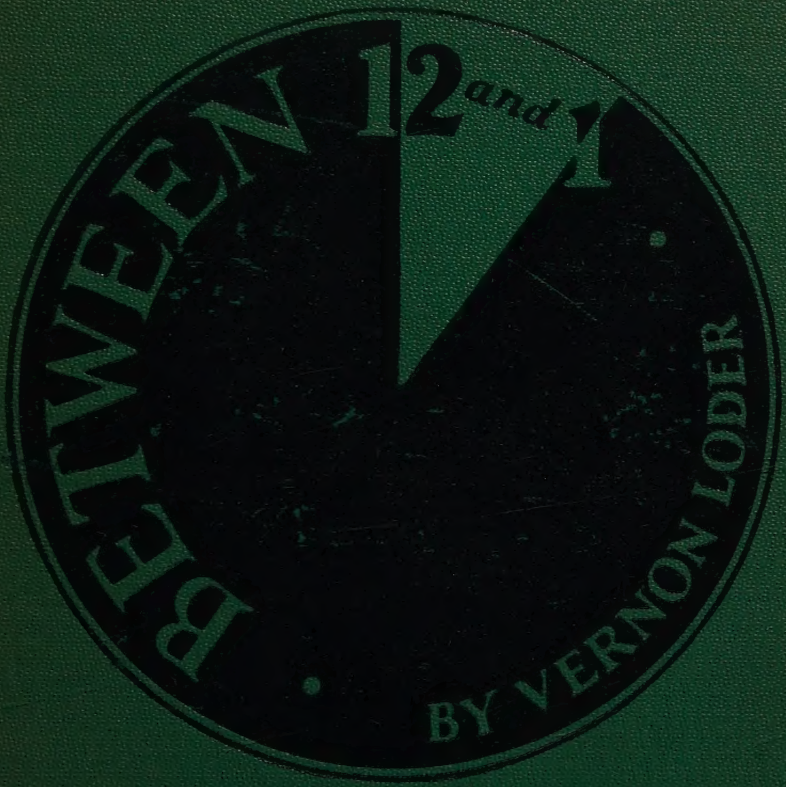
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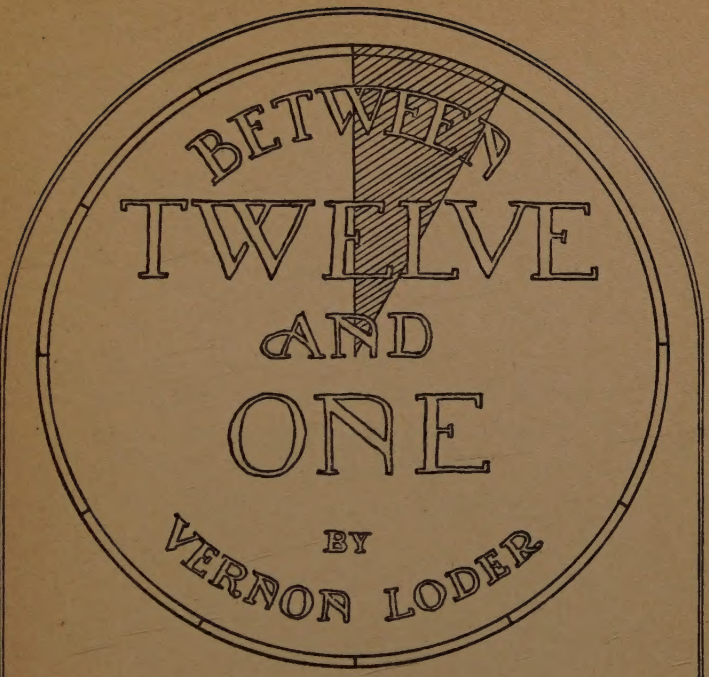

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TO

PHILIP AND BEATRICE

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE NINE STRANGERS	1
II.	MR. CUPOLIS DISAPPOINTS	13
III.	A NIGHT OF STORM	24
IV.	OUT OF THEIR HANDS	35
V.	SUPERINTENDENT COBHAM THROWS TONGUE	46
VI.	THE SCRATCHES	57
VII.	THE ORDEALS	69
VIII.	MERE PAPER	80
IX.	THE MARKS OF THE BEAST	90
X.	COBHAM IS SYMPATHETIC	101
XI.	FOLLOWING THE DRAG	107
XII.	COBHAM IS INTERESTED IN NATURAL HISTORY	118
XIII.	GOOD MEN AND TRUE	124
XIV.	SCIENCE DOES NOT ALWAYS KEEP ITS HEAD	133
XV.	BUT SUPERINTENDENT COBHAM DOES	144
XVI.	MR. CORBETT IS SPENDING MONEY	154
XVII.	HOPE IS DASHED	164

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVIII.	A LADY VOLUNTEERS SOME INFORMATION	176
XIX.	PERSECUTION MANIA	186
XX.	DID CUPOLIS KILL HIMSELF?	193
XXI.	THE RUEFUL INVESTORS	199
XXII.	AVOIRDUPOIS	209
XXIII.	A JOURNALISTIC SNOWBALL	220
XXIV.	ON THE TRACK OF THE PRODIGAL GREEK	228
XXV.	CLIVE MERTON GOES TO TOWN	237
XXVI.	CLIVE GUIDES THE RABBIT	248
XXVII.	THE SWING OF THE ROPE	258
XXVIII.	"THEY FIT!"	267
XXIX.	SUPERINTENDENT COBHAM PLAYS BOGEY	273
XXX.	COBHAM FINISHES ONE UP!	279
XXXI.	THE SUPERINTENDENT EXPLAINS	285
XXXII.	IN THE CHAIR	298

BETWEEN 12 AND 1

Chapter I

THE NINE STRANGERS

THE early holiday rush at the London terminus had subsided. The heavy freights of men, women, children, trunks, golf-clubs and fishing-rods, spades and buckets had been cleared from the platforms. The midday lull was over the place. There was a short spell of drowsy listlessness under the glaring glass roofs of the station, and heated porters mopped their streaming foreheads and counted up their spoils.

At one main platform stood the long southern express. This platform showed the sole sign of real life in all the vast terminus. The men on the engine were oiling up and making their last inspections. About fifty people had already settled themselves in the compartments, while a decorous stream of fresh passengers began to flow down the platform. But there was no real rush.

Those whose holidays were short (and must therefore be enjoyed to the greatest degree) had gone by the earlier trains. The dignified, afternoon express was patronized by a better, or, it may be, wealthier, class of traveler.

Midway in the long train, two first-class smoking

compartments bore labels indicating that they were reserved for "Mr. Cupolis's party." They were empty at the moment, but the guard kept a very attentive eye on them. From his experience of those who went down from time to time to stay at the financier's house at Tendon Mocket, he anticipated a profit on his courtesy. Cupolis, as the guard had more than once remarked to his wife, "did everything in grand style," and those who visit plutocrats cannot afford to appear ungenerous.

There were several false alarms for the guard that day. Hasty individuals, disregarding the warning labels, climbed into one or other of the reserved compartments. They backed out again when he discovered that they were not the privileged guests for Tendon Oaks, Mr. Cupolis's Wiltshire home.

There were still ten minutes before the train was due to start when a stout, red-faced man, with a clipped, white mustache, stopped to look at the label on the first compartment, then climbed in. The guard went over and spoke to him.

"Mr. Cupolis's party, sir? Very good, sir. You run right through to Tendon Mocket, sir.—Thank you, sir. It *is* very hot for the time of year.—Perhaps you would like the carriage window down a little?"

He was pocketing a shilling, when three more passengers turned up together; a pretty girl of about twenty-three, tall, slender, faintly smiling; a tall man with a pale face, very dark hair, and a look of boredom; and an athletic young man, with blue eyes, fair hair,

and a general appearance of finding life a very agreeable thing.

Though these three approached together to the compartment, they were actually unacquainted, and looked at each other, and at the first passenger, who was already seated, with an air of somewhat dubious expectancy. The guard included them all in his beaming smile, settled them comfortably, collected more shillings, and was about to turn away, when the fifth passenger arrived and entered the first compartment.

The guard did not like him. He was a small, hard-bitten man, with a bitter mouth, a snub-nose, and frosty gray eyes. He accepted the guard's attentions, listened without interest to his comments on the weather, and did not present him with any coin whatsoever.

The passenger who had first entered was a retired soldier, Brown by name; the pretty girl was a Miss Mary Glenne; while the tall man was called Colper, was heir to Sir Hope Colper, and never forgot the fact. The young man who appeared to find life agreeable was called Clive Merton, and devoted to yachting. The fifth passenger was Lord Cramish. Colper, giving him a slightly disdainful look, decided that he was a bit of a bounder. Tuft-hunters do make these mistakes sometimes.

The guard, recovering slowly from the shock of giving attentions to Lord Cramish and getting nothing in return, closed the door of that compartment and turned to await the arrival of the other privileged passengers.

These four turned up together when only five minutes remained before the train was due to start.

The guard ushered them hopefully into the second compartment, again patronized the weather, collected the last of his spoils, and went away to his other duties.

The latest comers settled themselves in their corners and began to study each other more or less politely. The oldest of the four was Professor Logard, a well-dressed man of seventy, with very white hair and the rather absent expression which so often marks out those who have devoted themselves to study rather than mankind. Smith, the man opposite to him, had a horse's face, a grim chin, a loose mouth; looked like a racing man, but was actually a gentleman farmer. The third man was a neutral individual, grizzled, wrinkled rather and carrying folded in his hand a copy of *The Financial Times*. His name was Andrews, and he was a retired solicitor. The last man was called Corbett, a big fellow, with a dour face, eyes that looked capable of temper, and a tight-lipped mouth. He was a racing man, and had been a famous amateur boxer.

It was some little time before the passengers in the second compartment thawed, and it was Andrews, the solicitor, who opened the conversation.

"*The Financial Times*," he said, tentatively looking at the others, and exhibiting the newspaper in his hand, "is—er—not the kind of paper to publish mere rumors. I presume you are all, like myself, interested in Mr. Cupolis's companies, so you will understand what a

nasty jar I got this morning when some one sent me a copy of the *Money-Maker's Journal*."

Professor Logard came out of a reverie and puckered his brow. "Are we to infer, sir, that it contained some disturbing reference to the process in which we are all scientifically or financially interested?"

The big man also stared at Andrews. "The devil it did!" he ejaculated, his mouth tightening.

Andrews nodded. "I am afraid so. Of course it may be merely a rumor. I hope it is. But lately I have begun to think that Cupolis ought to give us more information than he does."

Smith looked anxious, but remained silent. Professor Logard, who had put all his savings in the companies, and was getting old, shivered a little.

"May we hear the exact terms of this reference?" he asked.

Andrews looked at him. "Roughly, it is hinted that a great deal of money has been expended, while none had yet been earned. It asks who is Cupolis and where did he come from. The paper goes on to suggest that a committee of inquiry ought to be formed to go into the affairs of the promoter."

Logard shivered again. Smith grew very red in the face and looked fierce. Corbett banged down his huge fist on his knee and made no uncertain sound.

"If the blighter's done me, I'll make a damn mess of him!" he roared.

Logard put up a timid but protesting hand. "I think

there is nothing to be gained by violent speaking, or, if I may say so, by unprofitable speculations—"

"If it is an unprofitable speculation, I'll have a go at the fellow myself, hanged if I won't!" cried Smith. "I've got seven thou. in the show."

Corbett grew purple with rage. "It mayn't be true, of course. But I think myself that Cupolis has been cutting it too fat lately. They may be right. Who is he? What is he?"

"I don't know," said Smith.

"Isn't he a Greek?" asked Andrews.

"*Timeo Danaos ut dona ferentes*," murmured the poor professor. "I wish I knew."

"You speak Greek, sir?" asked Smith.

Logard shrugged. "I have some small acquaintance with ancient Greek," he replied, "but what I quoted just now is a Latin phrase meaning 'I fear the Greeks bearing gifts.'"

"It'll be Greek meeting Greek if he tries it on with me!" growled Corbett.

While the four men discussed Cupolis and his affairs, the five passengers in the other compartment were also talking over that rather intriguing subject.

The talk had begun when Clive Merton asked Miss Glenne if she objected to his cigarette. She did not, and the lighting up of three other cigarettes, metaphorically, broke the ice, Major Brown turning to her to ask if this was her first visit to Tendon Oaks.

"I confess that it is my own first visit," he added, pulling at his white mustache.

"And mine too," she replied, showing pretty teeth in a smile. "I wonder is it far from the station to the house?"

"I took the trouble of looking it up," said Colper. "It's right in the heart of the country."

Lord Cramish looked at them rather ferociously. "If you people had taken the trouble to look at the card Cupolis put in with the invitation, you would have seen that the house is fifteen miles from the station and cars will meet us."

Colper, who loved any title, however acquired, but was still under the impression that the "little bounder" was utterly negligible, shrugged insolently. But Cramish, who did not seem at all put out by the lack of response to his remark, spoke again.

"This is all very nice, you know. Reserved carriages in the train and cars to meet guests are good things in their way. But they've got to be paid for. Who's paying for them?"

"Seems fairly obvious," said Brown, staring at him. "I don't suppose Cupolis gets 'em free."

Colper smiled faintly. The girl bit her lip. Cramish glared at the speaker.

"A great many things may seem obvious to you, sir, if you insist on taking superficial views. What I want to know is, who is to pay for all this ultimately?"

"Do you suggest that Cupolis will present us with accounts on our arrival?" Colper asked, with a faint tinge of scorn in his voice.

Clive Merton and the girl exchanged amused glances. It seemed to them that hostilities were beginning too early among the members of the house-party.

Cramish snorted. "No, sir, I do not suggest it. I am beginning to fear that we do not see enough of Mr. Cupolis's accounts. I should like to see details and a proper balance-sheet and the certificates of some auditors we could rely on. I admit that, with a new and secret process, a certain amount of information must be withheld, even from the shareholders, for fear of a leakage, but Cupolis is overdoing it."

Mary Glenne started and studied the speaker's face with interest not unmixed with anxiety. Brown laughed.

"I hope you are prepared to tell him so?"

"I am prepared to tell him so!" snapped the other. "That is my intention. I do not know if you are all shareholders in his companies, but I am, and I shall insist on getting some details about them which have not yet been vouchsafed to us."

"I am a shareholder—at least my father is," said the girl. "He did not suspect that there was anything wrong. He understood that the whole thing would be put before the shareholders when everything was settled."

"That is what I thought," said Brown.

"I am a shareholder too," remarked Merton.

Colper raised supercilious eyebrows. "I have taken a flier myself, but I am not a stockbroker or a man of business."

"Nor am I, sir!" said Cramish viciously, "but I am not a fool, and I do not care for fools!"

In a frenzy of resentment he took a card from his case and flipped it on to Colper's knee. While Colper was looking at it through his eyeglass, Merton asked a question.

"I'm afraid I have little experience in matters of this kind, sir," he said, "but the sum I have invested is a large one, and I cannot afford to lose it. I hope you are merely being cautious when you suggest that the companies are shaky?"

"I do not see why we should suspect it at all," said Brown, before Cramish could reply. "Most of us invested our money, I suspect, not because Cupolis asked us, but because, behind the scheme, there is this Professor Demetrius. Even the papers that always try to knock Cupolis's companies admit that Demetrius is a scientist with a European reputation. No one can expect him to give away his formulae, or whatever they are called, with so many sharks about to pick his brains. When they first talked of the process of getting nitrates from the air, you know, people thought it was stark lunacy."

"My father said something like that," agreed Mary Glenne.

Cramish nodded. "Well, as I said just now, I am not a business man. I wouldn't have put a penny in the companies if Demetrius had not declared that his process was scientifically perfect. I do not even suggest that there may not be chemicals to be got from the air any more than I doubt that the fixation of nitrogen is a fact and a source of commercial profit. With Demetrius' name behind it, no one can call us fools for investing. But we shall be more than that if we allow Cupolis to fritter away our money in extravagance before the factory is even finished or a penny made."

"The factory isn't half built yet," said Merton.

Cramish nodded. "No. If Cupolis were known to us as a man with a private fortune, his house in Wiltshire, his villa on the Riviera, and the house in town would be natural enough. Then we should not object to his spending money like water. We would know it was his own. Lately, however, I have been making inquiries, and no one can prove that he has resources, apart from monies invested by us and others. We're all asses at times, or men like Whitaker Wright and others wouldn't have dressed down a lot of fellows who were looked on as keen, long-headed men."

The others looked their dismay. Brown nodded. "You may be right. The stupid and simple confidence trick has taken in men who thought themselves foolproof. And Cupolis has a way with him. I thought him a charming fellow."

Cramish looked grim. "Quite so. He has dined and wined most of us already. He has the gift of tongues in more senses than one."

"I thought him fascinating," said Colper, who had now decided that his fellow passenger might be recognized.

Mary Glenne's face had fallen. Her father, a chronic invalid, had invested twenty thousand pounds in the companies, and it was almost with horror that she learned that Cramish was suspicious.

"Can it be true?" she cried in distress. "I thought they were to pay fifty per cent."

Merton tried to reassure her. "Well, boiled down to bare bones, we have nothing but speculation yet. Lord Cramish is going to ask Cupolis about it, and I think Cupolis expected some questions at this stage. Would he ask us down to see him if he was anxious to evade them?"

Cramish agreed. "I admit that point, and, as I shall press him for some details this evening, and communicate his answer to you all, perhaps it is better to let it go at that for the present. I did not mean to alarm you unnecessarily."

The other guests in that compartment breathed sighs of relief. The anxious talk subsided. Perhaps they had exaggerated the suspicions born in them of Cramish's first remarks. After all, there was Professor Demetrius. . . .

The day grew more sultry. Heavy dun clouds shot

with coppery tinges piled up in the west. On one horizon massed, white cumulus clouds shone like snow. There was no breath of air; even the country through which they rushed had a jaded listless look. A storm was imminent.

Chapter II

MR. CUPOLIS DISAPPOINTS

STRANGELY enough the arrival of the express at Tendon Mocket station, with their release from the stuffy compartments into what was by comparison a fresher air, appeared to relieve the nine passengers of a certain part of their depression. This happy effect was added to by the sight of two servants, in Mr. Cupolis's liveries, who were waiting on the platform.

They might be a sign that the financier was spending money rapidly; and the further vision of two Rolls Royce saloons, which stood outside, might confirm that view. But the fact is that these portents were also comforting, and did not hint at any imminent catastrophe, and the faces of the guests brightened as they were ushered into the cars and set off on the long drive to Tendon Oaks.

In the regrouping which had necessarily taken place at the station, Miss Glenne traveled in the first car with Lord Cramish, Mr. Colper, Major Brown and Professor Logard. The latter scanned the hot sky with interest as they sped along and presently announced that there would be a storm.

"Very likely," said Lord Cramish, with meaning in his voice; "at least *one*, if I know anything about it!"

But now he did not gain general assent. Colper was impressed by the two cars. Major Brown was not by nature suspicious of any one for long; while Mary Glenne was of an optimistic temperament, and also allowed the wish to father the thought. As for Professor Logard, he had allowed some academic question to usurp the place in his mind so recently filled with alarming suspicions and doubts.

They all knew Tendon Oaks by repute. It was a show-place in the county; a big Tudor house, built in the shape of the letter L, with some fine entertaining rooms, a private chapel, a banqueting hall, and a picture gallery. It stood in an immense park, on the summit of a hill, with delightful views over the wooded country below and around.

When he first rented the place, Cupolis had got his secretary, Vance Mand, to compile a little guide to the house, explaining its architectural beauties, with illustrations and plans executed by an eminent architect. Mand, who had had a distinguished record at Cambridge, had done it very well, and written a little historical preface. It was Mr. Cupolis's custom to present a copy of the guide to each guest at Tendon Oaks.

Vance Mand himself welcomed the new arrivals when they entered the house. He was a tall man and finely built, good-looking, blue-eyed, and fair. He gave the impression of being both honest and amiable.

"I am sorry Mr. Cupolis cannot be down himself to

receive you," he said a few minutes later, "but he only arrived from Scotland this morning. I regret to say that he developed a chill on the way and went to bed. He asked me to convey his apologies to you."

They were complaisant and sympathetic now. Mand smiled and showed them a little pile of books, neatly bound in chrome leather, which stood on a little table in the hall.

"I don't think there is any danger of losing your way here," he went on, giving a copy to Mary Glenne, "but you may find the plans helpful, if you are interested in old places." He opened one of the guides and unfolded a plan. "Here, for instance, is the picture gallery. There are some family portraits, by Lely and others, and some good examples of the Dutch school."

He turned to the plan as he spoke, and Mary Glenne followed his finger with her eyes as he traced a progress from the hall to the gallery. "Then all the rooms on the upper floor are bedrooms," he continued. "The servants' quarters are completely cut off from the rest of the house.—I shall show you your rooms presently. They are numbered on the plan, and if you glance at that you will have no difficulty in finding your way about the upper part of the house."

The other guests opened their copies of the guide and studied them with interest. They thought it was an original idea, especially when they remembered the many and rambling passages common to most old man-

sions. Some of them, at least, would have agreed with the guard on the train that Cupolis "did things in the grand style."

Meanwhile, the butler had brought in cocktails and whisky and soda, with tea for Miss Glenne. Mand did his best to entertain them, and later on showed them the rooms they were to occupy upstairs.

"You will like this room, I hope," he said to Mary Glenne, opening the door of a bedroom facing west. "Mr. Cupolis has the room to the left, but our walls are thick, and a sick man can be restless here without disturbing any one in the adjoining apartments. Dinner is early here. We have it at seven. One of the maids will come up to help you in a moment."

The room at the farther side of the host's was given to the elderly professor. Major Brown had the room next Mary Glenne's to the right, Corbett the room beyond that. Lord Cramish was next to Professor Logard. On the other side of the passage slept Andrews, Smith and Colper—the latter somewhat annoyed that he had not been given one of the rooms facing west.

As these entered the rooms allotted to them, Mand turned with a smile to Clive Merton. "We haven't quite forgotten you, Mr. Merton," he said; "I have a room in the other wing with a window which is charmingly corbeled out. There is an almost similar room next door to it allotted to you, but if you prefer mine, by all means have it."

Clive shook his head good-humoredly. "My dear fellow, I can sleep anywhere; yachting gives one a taste for small spaces."

Mand smiled. "Good. I believe you're a bit of a racing skipper? I'm only sorry we can't rig you up a bunk to make you happy!"

He took Clive to his room, and the latter voted it delightful.

"It must be rather a bore for Cupolis getting knocked up at this moment," Clive commented, when he had looked about him.

"I am afraid it will be rather boring for you people," said Mand. "I'll do what I can, but I admit I have no genius for entertaining. Mr. Cupolis has. Funny how we British haven't a flair for either that or concocting a carnival. You might tell them, however, that we have a billiard room, wireless, a music room with a player-piano, and, outside, a certain amount of sport! Mr. Cupolis says I have a catalogue, but no imagination. When he is in charge, I do believe he could get his guests to play tiddledywinks and have them swearing it was the finest sport in the world."

He offered Clive a cigarette from his case and lighted one himself. It seemed as if he had taken a particular fancy to Merton, who was himself taken with the attentive secretary.

"Lucky man," replied Clive. "I suppose you are too much engaged in his business to study parlor tricks."

Mand shook his head. "No. Not at all. I know

no more about his business than the man in the moon. But I am busy all the same. I do the social side of his correspondence, which is a big thing in itself. I have to attend to the charity bag. You would hardly believe the immense, and sometimes pathetic, bag of appeals that comes to us every day. The penalty of wealth, don't you know. I can't swear it is strictly true, but Mr. Cupolis boasts that he has the whole weight of his business on his own shoulders."

"I hope they are strong enough," said Merton, laughing.

"Absolutely," said Mand, with a smile. "He never passed through a university, but I wish I had half his brains. Why, his last visit to Scotland was in connection with a million pound proposition, he tells me."

He went away presently, and Clive Merton looked at his watch and sat down by the window to look out. The sky was more copperish than ever; the sun shone like a red-hot disk. Evidently the thunderstorm imminent there was only biding its time.

But he did not think of the thunderstorm. He had seen too much rough weather to worry about thunder or lightning. He was really thinking about Mary Glenne.

He thought her charming. He had never seen any young woman before with whom he had felt so soon on terms of something like intimacy. He admitted that to himself quite unashamedly. Until now women, charming and otherwise, had been a background merely.

Mary Glenne miraculously stood out in the picture, and he liked her there, and knew that she also occupied the center of his thoughts.

But his thoughts of her were mingled with some disquiet.

During the latter part of the journey from town, he had chatted with her and discovered that her father was a chronic invalid. He had also gathered that the money invested by the latter in the companies of Mr. Cupolis represented the greater part of his capital. If it were lost they would be in a sorry plight.

Clive recollected what the secretary had said to him. It might be so. But the word of the secretary was not to be taken without confirmation. It was evident that the young man had a great admiration for his employer. Clive mused. Like so many others, he had been hypnotized by the man's charm. Again, on his own showing, he knew nothing of the financial details of the business. He was busied with social correspondence and replies to charitable appeals.

"And yet I don't know why the dickens we all started on that gloomy tack on the train," he reflected. "I think it was that chap Cramish put the wind up us, and mob-psychology did the rest. Well, he can do the investigating too! I should be all right in a gale, but navigating in this kind of water is not my specialty."

In her own room, Mary Glenne was thinking of Clive Merton. Every one had been polite and pleasant to her, but she felt that it was to Clive she would have

turned if she found herself in a difficulty. He looked at once sympathetic and helpful. There are hundreds of most sympathetic people who expend all their vital force in friendliness and have none to spare for practical exertions.

On the whole she felt reassured. The atmosphere of Tendon Oaks was that of luxury and restfulness. She sat down near her window and looked over the pages of Mr. Cupolis's souvenir of the great house, until the maid came to tell her that her bath was ready.

Dinner was served in a great, oak-paneled chamber that reminded Mary of a public hall. Mand took the head of the table, in the unavoidable absence of his employer. In spite of his modest reference to his own capabilities, he kept the table entertained very well.

Most of them warmed up under the spell of excellent food and wine, and even Lord Cramish seemed to relax for a little his business-like outlook. Soon the talk was general and Mary did not feel in the least embarrassed by the fact that she was the only lady there.

She sat on Mr. Mand's right hand, with Professor Logard to her right, and she and her neighbor discovered a common taste in music, while, when he had a moment to spare, Mand chimed in and showed that he, too, was devoted to it. Haydn was his favorite, and after dinner he promised to play one of the sonatas to them.

Corbett, Andrews, and Smith were not men with

musical tastes, but the others voted for the music room after dinner, and the three, on this first evening, did not jump at the idea of playing pool in the billiard room. They took their cigars into the charming apartment where an organ stood, in addition to a grand piano, and there the whole party gathered after dinner.

"I can't promise you jazz," said Mand, glancing smilingly at the three obvious outsiders in this game, "but Miss Glenne has asked me to play you some Haydn, and he, at least, has a melody to boast.—No, I am not going to play it on the organ," he added, with a laugh, as Corbett glanced distrustfully at that instrument; "it goes delightfully on the piano."

"We are looking forward to a treat," said the professor, rubbing his hands together. "*Non omnia possumus omnes.* But all of us can listen."

Smith glanced at him amusedly. He thought him a very queer old bird, and was not sure if this last classical reference was another concealed hit at their Greek host.

When Mand played Haydn's third sonata, he disclosed himself as no mean musician. Even the Philistine three forgot their cigars for a little and sat back in their chairs, carried away to some unfamiliar, but agreeable, mental land.

The professor beat time with a wrinkled hand. Mary and Clive exchanged glances of quiet pleasure. Colper for the moment seemed almost a human being. Major Brown was back in Cashmere; slimmer and younger, and not alone.

The butler came into the room quietly. He had a note on a salver. He stopped near the door, unnoticed by most of the guests, glanced at with indifference by Andrews, waiting till a pause came in the music.

Mand played on. Then he came to the end, and in the storm of clapping that arose the butler advanced to him.

"Mr. Cupolis's compliment, sir, and he said I was to give you this."

Mand turned on the piano stool. "You have been up? How is he?"

The butler lowered his voice. "He rang for me, sir. He seemed very unwell, I must say. I asked him would he have the doctor, but he said no."

Mand glanced uncomfortably at the guests. But only one or two seemed to have heard the man's low remark.

"Thank you. I'll go up presently," he said, and took the note.

The butler withdrew, closing the door behind him.

Mand apologized, slit open the envelope, which was gummed down, and ran his eyes over the note it contained. Without rudely staring at him, the guests furtively studied his face.

They saw him start, saw his eyes turn rapidly to the beginning and read down again, his face drawn, his eyes staring, his whole attitude expressive of the deepest anxiety. He jumped to his feet.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed harshly. "Good heavens!"

Lord Cramish was on his feet. "What is it? You look like a ghost."

Mand bit his lip. "Excuse me.—I must go up at once."

He went blindly through them, across the floor, and out of the room. As the door closed behind him, the first grumblings of thunder came dourly from the west.

Chapter III

A NIGHT OF STORM

THE rain which had begun to beat with great violence on the windows of the music room was unheard and unheeded by the nine guests. It was as if not a storm but a bombshell had burst over them. Some of the men sprang up. Mary Glenne, white as a sheet, crossed over to Clive and asked him what could have happened.

Her voice under this nervous strain was unexpectedly loud and clear. Lord Cramish turned towards her with a snarl on his face. The snarl was not directed at her. It expressed his own angry feelings.

"Happened?" he cried. "I bet something has gone wrong. Did you see that fellow's face? He was not only startled but shocked. Damn it, I shouldn't be surprised if the fellow's committed suicide!"

"But why should Mr. Mand—" began Mary, trembling.

"He means Cupolis," cried Corbett, getting up and looming powerful and threatening. "Hey, don't you mean Cupolis?"

The professor gave what was almost a shrill cry. "Don't say that! It can't be!"

Mary Glenne sat down. Major Brown remained

like an image in his chair, his face red and inflamed. Andrews and Smith seemed stupefied as they stood staring about the big room.

"I mean Cupolis," said Cramish bitterly. "We all had a feeling there was something wrong. Now we come here and the man can't face us. He sends a note down to Mand, and Mand gets the knock. Any of you could see what happened to Mand. He was thunderstruck. He looked as if the end of the world had come. I tell you something is amiss, and that damned coward upstairs hasn't the face to tell us!"

Merton got up slowly. He was white, but he was more calm than the others, and spoke without emphasis.

"Let's wait till we see Mand. I don't believe much in premonitions. I think we ought to look to facts. All this is rather alarming, too, to Miss Glenne here. I suggest that we sit down as quietly as we can until we know more."

"I don't suppose you'll be as hard hit as we are," said Smith, rather bitterly; "we can't keep yachts—at least I can't."

Merton looked at him sharply. "That may be so. I am not only concerned for myself."

"Right!" cried Major Brown, straightening himself up. "We don't know that we have taken a toss yet."

The men on their feet rather sheepishly sat down and began to talk together in low tones. Clive tried to reassure Mary and the old professor, who was near them. Colper, white about the gills, and more upset

than he cared to show, talked to Cramish in short, staccato sentences. The grumbling thunder from the west came like an ominous obbligato to this talk, but the storm was still some distance away.

Silence suddenly fell. It was like that silence which comes before a storm breaks, deep and impressive, with a warning chill in it. Mand had opened the door and was coming down the room. He walked haltingly, with a heavy and nervous tread. His face was twitching; his mouth was hardly in control. He looked straight before him, a dazed look in his eyes, until he had reached the piano. He turned there and leaned against the case, with an odd suggestion of a temperamental tenor about to deliver some tragic song.

Lord Cramish got to his feet. His lips were tight, his eyes hard. "Now, Mr. Mand, let us hear the news of your patient," he said, and there was a sneer in his voice.

Mand shrugged, wet his lips. "I have sent for the doctor," he said. "He seems ill, but I cannot say. We shall hear when the doctor comes."

The guests looked at each other. Corbett got up, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and spoke.

"Look here, Mand, I'm not a fellow to beat about the bush. We all know it isn't your fault, but, as you represent Cupolis, we want to know a few things; see?"

"Quite right," said Andrews hoarsely.

Mand bowed. "You are quite justified. I—" he broke off, and looked down at his feet.

For a few moments the violent thrash of the rain was the only sound that broke the stillness. Corbett then spoke again.

"We don't need to be told that it wasn't the state of health of that beggar upstairs that knocked you endwise. Something is up, and we've got to get to the bottom of it. Cramish thinks there's been some juggling with our money. What about it?"

Mand recovered himself, passed a hand over his lips, and nodded. "I am sorry to say that your fears are correct. It is a dreadful thing to say. It is dreadful that I am left to say it. But it is true. When I saw Mr. Cupolis just now he seemed too ill to talk, but the note he sent down to me is sufficient."

"Be hanged to this palaver; let us hear what it said!" roared Smith.

Mand shrugged again. "It simply asked me to break it to you that, owing to some financial crash abroad, in which Mr. Cupolis was interested, he must go smash. His affairs will go into the hands of the official receiver.—I am sorry. I know what it will mean to you. I put my own savings in the thing, but, of course, I can get a new post."

Had it not been such a tragic moment, it would have been interesting to a psychologist to note how the breaking of the storm, the bursting of that bombshell directly over their heads, affected the nine guests. Ruin searches out men as a battle does. In a hot fight, the meek man may go berserk; the truculent fellow

be stolid and meek; the man of nerves may show none; the man who is always depressed in normal times may become the optimist of the struggle.

It was Corbett, Smith and Andrews who now remained quiet and appeared less affected by the truth than they had been by the shadow of it. Even Lord Cramish seemed to retire into himself, as if meditating on the chances of salving something from the wreck.

But the old professor was utterly changed. All his life mildly believing in other men, he now found that his trust had been shockingly betrayed, and turned into a perfect fury, with tossing white hair, flaming eyes, and a tongue that bit like acid. Colper had dropped his super-gentlemanliness and swore like a trooper. Mary Glenne, her mind full of her stricken and ruined father, was flaming with resentment. Clive Merton, who could stand the loss better than most of them, thought of Mary and had his hackles up like a fighting cock.

"You mean that scoundrel upstairs has cheated us all, stolen our money, and wasted it like this!" he cried, waving an angry hand to indicate the luxuriously furnished room. "And he's too ill to see us? Well, I think I'll go up to see him, all the same! I have an idea I can stimulate him into a little activity!"

He moved towards the door. Mand, his face still moved, ran and caught him by the sleeve. "Don't, Mr. Merton! He seems really ill. If you force yourself upon him, I can't be responsible; and if any-

thing happens to him, you may be censured. Wait, please! The doctor ought to be here soon. When he gives us his opinion we shall know if it would be safe to interview him."

Mary Glenne came to herself suddenly and backed up Mand in his plea.

"Please, Mr. Merton.—How far away is the doctor?" she added to Mand.

"Only a mile, Miss Glenne, and I sent a man on a motor-bicycle. He can't be long."

"Let me see him," said the professor suddenly; "I should not worry him. I should be very careful. But I should just like to ask him what I am to do."

The others stared at him. He was certainly not mad, but there was a look in his eyes that told them he had been at least temporarily unbalanced by the shock.

Lord Cramish dryly intervened. "Sit down, professor. We must wait."

They all sat down. Mary talked in a low voice to Merton. The professor sat twisting his hands, his lips moving as if he were muttering rapidly.

The storm seemed to have withdrawn a little. The thunder grumbled no longer. The rain did not slash now at the windows.

Mand sat a little apart, his face bent downwards. Sometimes the talk about him rose into a buzz. Sometimes there was a strange silence for a few minutes. But he did not speak to any of the guests and none of them addressed him. They felt that, at the worst, he

could not have lost much; and was young enough not to feel it as they did.

The butler came in at last to announce that the doctor had come and was in Mr. Cupolis's bedroom. Mand spoke in an unnaturally loud voice.

"Please ask Dr. Black to step in here the moment he comes down," he said. "We are most anxious to hear his verdict."

The butler looked about him for a moment. It was obvious that he knew there was a tense and strange atmosphere in the room, while he did not know the cause of it.

"Very well, sir," he said, and went out.

Mand turned to the others. "You have been very good. It has not been easy for me.—I assure you that nothing any of you has said is unjustified, if we have heard the truth. We can only hope, and it may not even amount to a hope, that Mr. Cupolis was not correct in what he said in that note. He may be delirious as a result of his illness."

That last remark changed the atmosphere. However small and light a straw may seem to be, to the drowning it represents a floating ally. The nine guests at once began to ask each other if this might not be true. They clustered round Mand and asked him a hundred questions.

Did Cupolis seem delirious? Did he look dazed or light-headed? Did he appear to speak lucidly? Was his writing crooked, out of alignment, in that note?

Was there really anything to indicate that he was not in his normal senses?

"You see," said Andrews, a gleam of hope in his eyes, "we all know what a fellow can be after, say, influenza. I believe I tried to climb out of a window once myself. If Cupolis felt ill and got some crazy idea into his head—"

The door opened and a tall, thin man of fifty entered the room, the butler announcing:

"Dr. Black, sir."

Mand went forward and spoke. The doctor nodded shortly to the other occupants of the room and said something softly, his eyebrows going up as he spoke.

"We are all most anxious to hear," said Mand. "Will you be good enough to repeat that, doctor? I can assure you that it will be no breach of confidence."

"As you please," said the physician, and raised his voice; "I am sorry to say that Mr. Cupolis is suffering from no illness whatsoever. I don't know that I should say any more. On the whole I think I shall not."

"Then I shall," said Mand abruptly. "Dr. Black assures me that Cupolis has been using drugs; cocaine. He will not be in a state to see any one until to-morrow at least—if then."

Corbett rapped out an oath. But Lord Cramish held out his hand.

"Wait a bit! That may prove what Mand talked of. A drug-taker does get wild fancies. To-morrow, if he is better, I undertake to put him through it."

The doctor stared at them as if they were a collection of wild beasts. He favored with an extra hard stare the old professor, who had jumped up and condemned the man upstairs to a region far below. Then Mand took him by the elbow and, promising to explain to him, led him out of the room.

When he had gone, Merton had an idea. "Can some one wire to town?" he asked. "If this wretched news is true, would Cupolis be likely to break it to us to-night, unless it was bound to come out at once?"

"You're right," said Andrews; "if it is true, then he knew the information would be out to-day. Lord Cramish, do you know where we could hear anything?"

Cramish nodded. "Of course. I have a friend on the Stock Exchange. I'll telephone at once to his private house. It might come through on the wireless news (a crash like that), only we can't be sure of it.—I'll go."

"There's a telephone in the hall," said Major Brown.

Cramish nodded and went out. They had complete confidence in him. His head for business was a sound one.

"What am I to do, if it's true?" cried Mary Glenne. "It will kill poor dad! He set so much on it. Could Mr. Cupolis be such an utter beast?"

Clive Merton had been sitting brooding beside her. He turned. "Very likely. These devils get your money and don't worry about you. They spend it, or speculate with it."

"That's right," said Colper venomously; "I think

men like that—your wild-cat financiers—ought to be hung, drawn and quartered! Jail's no good to 'em."

Corbett had come up. "Well, I would just like to have one round with our sick friend upstairs. I'd show him something!"

"Mine's a horsewhip," said Smith loudly. "You can do great things with a whip if you know how."

Mary Glenne bit her lip. She was upset and alarmed by the violent turn the conversation had taken. She was afraid if it went on she would either faint or burst into hysterical sobbing.

"Please don't talk like that!" she appealed to the men, with her eyes full of tears. "Don't you think even now there may be some mistake about Mr. Cupolis's difficulties? Surely, if he was ruined, he wouldn't have asked us here?"

Smith recovered himself a little. "I wish I could think so. His invitation to us is very odd, but then didn't Mand say he was doping lately?"

Colper nodded angrily. "Of course he did. The doctor wanted to keep it dark."

Clive reflected. "Ever since I heard the news, I have been wondering about it. It may not have been the dope. If Cupolis knew his affairs were in this state, very likely he knew it months ago and the position affected his brain. Madness would explain his extraordinary conduct."

Mary nodded rueful agreement. "I never thought of that. I was hoping against hope. But, of course, if

his mind was unbalanced, he might do the most unaccountable things."

"He did, confound him!" grumbled Smith.

They heard footsteps outside the door. The handle turned and Mand and Cramish came in together.

"It's true!" said Mand heavily.

"True?" Seven or eight voices cried the word together.

"True," said Lord Cramish. "Let me sit down and stay down. I wouldn't trust myself if I went up near that skunk!"

Chapter IV

OUT OF THEIR HANDS

FOR a minute or two there was a perfect babel of sound. Every one was talking at once. Mand walked distractedly up and down among them, appealed to here and there for an opinion, but unable to suggest anything, except patience.

Presently Lord Cramish got up, and the voices died down. He held his lips tight for a moment, glancing grimly about him, then his hard voice made itself heard.

"Mand is right. We're stuck here for the night at least. I had intended, and do intend, to stay in any case until I can see Cupolis. Talk will do us no good. Action, and that of a definite kind, is the only thing. But the time for it hasn't come yet."

"It has come!" said Professor Logard. "This is the time; the appointed time!"

Mary Glenne glanced at him. He was glaring into space. Lord Cramish gave the sort of shrug given by the chairman of a company meeting when a perverse shareholder interrupts him.

"It is after ten now, and I intend to go to bed. I advise you all to do the same."

Merton nodded at Mary. "I think Lord Cramish is right," he said.

Rather to his surprise, there was a general murmur of acquiescence, though Logard did not join in it. Mand noted this and, smiling sympathetically, went up to the old man and offered his arm.

"You are tired and distressed, sir," he said in a low voice. "Allow me to take you upstairs."

The professor looked at him. "Yes, take me up," he said, very simply; "I feel very tired. I haven't done very much work to-day; but I feel very tired."

The others watched him sympathetically as Mand led him out of the room. Andrews, Smith and Corbett followed, talking softly but angrily. Major Brown and Colper, with Lord Cramish stalking alone behind them, also left the room. Mary Glenne turned to Clive Merton.

"Poor old man," she said brokenly. "Do you think it will be safe to leave him?"

Merton nodded gloomily. "I think he is exhausted. There was a moment when I thought he was going off his head.—This is a bad business."

He saw her upstairs to the door of her room, bade her good-night shortly, and went off to his own room near Mand's. His fury was not yet cold in him. When he thought of Mary and her father, broken in this crash; when he remembered the old professor, swindled out of his life savings, he clenched his teeth and swore inwardly.

Ten minutes after the household had retired to bed, the rain began to fall more heavily again. The thunder grumbled once more, but this time from the great plain to the south.

The atmosphere of the house was close and sultry. The heat of the night drew out the faint pungencies of old woodwork. Inside, the air was very calm and still. Outside, the windows gave out a thrumming; streams of water from the roofs rushed down the eaves-gutters and splashed down the outlet pipes.

The storm was creeping north, making one of those wide, circular movements. Over the vast plain the lightning flickered and shot. The wide and thin blaze of lateral flashes was alternated with great vivid forks that seemed to break at their ends into little, diverging streams of light. A single, sudden flash near the house brought after it an echoing crash.

Mary Glenne had put on a dressing-gown, and sat drearily listening to the rain. She could not sleep. She had cried a little. She had recovered herself again and tried to think what she must do. How was she to break it to her father? Would it be wiser to wait to see if anything could be recovered? Did it mean that everything was gone?

Fatigue, trouble, the tension of her nerves, gradually became merged in a weariness that verged on sleep. She closed her eyes. She opened them quickly when that first crash of thunder came. As it was not repeated, she closed them again. She must have slept for

a little sitting there. She awoke to find herself cramped. The thunder was nearer now. She was not afraid. Worse than thunder had come and passed over her. She took off her dressing-gown and crept into bed. Though the room was so stuffy she shivered a little. As she drew the clothes about her she thought she heard a light footstep pass her door. She did not hear it again.

But now that she was in bed she felt actually less sleepy. She lay there listening to the louder thunder, seeing her room occasionally lit up thinly by a flash. Some one seemed to go by her door again, but this time there was a creak, a little after the footsteps had passed, as if one of the guests had opened his own door to see who was passing.

And yet that could not be, thought Mary. Perhaps it was the first person returning. Then she remembered that both sets of footsteps had seemed to be going in the same direction. It meant nothing.

She dozed after a while, and then a tremendous roar from the heavens brought her to herself. She sat up in bed. Almost simultaneously she thought she heard a window open. But now one crash followed another. The rain redoubled. It was as if a giant was throwing handfuls of pebbles at the panes of the window. But this was the last phase of the storm. Southward, the sky was clear and full of bright stars. Of a sudden the rain ceased abruptly, and an uncanny silence followed.

She distinctly heard the mournful screech of an owl outside.

The house seemed to sleep. She felt exhausted. She lay down and in ten minutes was oblivious to everything. It seemed only ten minutes more till she found a maid at her bedside with her morning tea. The sunshine was streaming into the room.

She sat up smiling. She had not yet remembered the shock of the night before. The smiling maid evidently knew nothing of it. It was only when she poured out a cup of tea and had it on its way to her lips that she found it all come back to her.

The maid had left the room to turn on her bath. She put down the cup and half choked. The tears came to her eyes. It had been no mere nightmare. Cupolis was ruined. He had ruined her and her father. How could she have forgotten even for a moment?

A bird began to sing in a tree beyond the lawn.

Her tears came fast now. And then a noise broke out that made her jump out of bed, hurriedly dry her tears and go near the door, to listen, with a fearful face.

A man was shouting something incoherent. Doors banged. Feet came rushing along the passage. She thought the door of a room next her own was flung back. Voices were raised in several keys. She thought she heard Lord Cramish swear suddenly, then the high voice of the old professor.

For a moment she thought the old man had gone mad. He had looked so wild the evening before when he heard the news of the crash. Then she heard the sound of an undoubted fall and another rush of feet in the passage.

She opened her door a little, and peeped out. She could see several men in pyjamas. Merton, his face towards her, was kneeling down, holding up the head of Professor Logard, who had fallen in a fit or faint. The farmer, Smith, was beside him, and Corbett and a man-servant.

"He'll be all right," she heard Merton say, to her great relief. "Dead faint, that's all. The news has upset him."

Mary Glenne shut her door and began to dress hurriedly. She did not go to her bath. She feared that something had happened, and did not know what it was. There was now less noise in the passage, but feet still came and went at intervals, and when she emerged at last from her room, Mand and Lord Cramish stood outside the door of Cupolis's room, which the former had just locked and from which he was in the act of removing the key as Mary came on them.

She had no longer any doubt that something had happened, and that something a more serious affair than the professor's faint. Mand was white to the lips; Cramish was white and grim. She heard Mand speak before he saw her.

"Of course I have to lock it. No one must go in

until the police come. They don't want to have any tracks fouled."

Then Cramish saw her and came over. "Miss Glenne, will you come down with me. Professor Logard has not been well."

She looked at him hard. The room that Mand had locked up was not that occupied by the professor. Mand did not speak. He bit his lip, as if uncertain if they should tell her.

"I know; but something else has happened, hasn't it?" she asked in a low voice. "Is Mr. Cupolis dead?"

Cramish started, but shut his mouth tightly. Mand hesitated, then spoke. "You must know it sooner or later. Mr. Cupolis is dead."

In spite of the ruin brought on her by the dead man, Mary felt a swift wave of pity. "Was it suicide?" she asked.

Cramish took up the tale. "We don't know. It's uncertain yet. Mr. Mand has sent to Hindon for the police.—I'll take Miss Glenne down, Mand."

He took her arm firmly, but politely, and escorted her downstairs. "Shocking case," he said in a low voice as they descended; "I think it is suicide myself. I don't pretend to feel deeply about the man, but it's a shock all the same."

She assented. It was a dreadful thing, but in her heart of hearts she knew that Cramish was right. Naturally, conventionally, expressions of sympathy follow a tragedy of that kind, but it is mere hypocrisy

to say that any withers are deeply wrung by it. Cupolis had ruined some of them, caused serious inconvenience to others. His very invitation to them to stay at the house, that he might present them with the news of the crash, was in itself an outrage.

"Long ago, people would say it was a judgment on him," she said soberly.

"Some will say so now," said Cramish, as they reached the hall, "and I don't know that they will be very far wrong!"

Mary could not assent. Though harder hit than he, some of her bitterness had evaporated with Cupolis's death. She found it hard to hate a man who had no longer any power for evil.

Cramish pressed her arm kindly. "We are going to have breakfast," he added. "Don't shudder! We don't want to have you down on our hands. But I know you will be brave. You'll try to eat, won't you?"

She nodded silently. She knew that he was right. It was going to be an ordeal for them all.

He took her into a small room where breakfast had been laid. Six of the guests were there. The professor was having his breakfast in his bedroom.

Merton greeted Mary with a moody nod. The other men bowed more or less indifferently. All of them were under the shadow of the tragedy.

But no one spoke of the thing itself. Corbett was eating heartily, though he looked grim and dour. Andrews and Smith were at the sideboard, cutting cold

ham for themselves. Colper looked icily distrait. Major Brown drew up a seat for her next his own, while Lord Cramish, relinquishing her arm, poured her out a cup of coffee, and went off to get her some fish.

She sat down quietly and sipped her coffee. She tried to eat a little of the fish Cramish brought her, but could only get down a few mouthfuls and fell back upon some dry toast. Somehow, the silence that had fallen over the room did not disconcert her. It seemed natural and inevitable. No one wished to canvass the details of the tragedy at that moment.

She had nearly finished when Merton spoke. "Does any one know if the professor is all right?"

Cramish nodded. "I have seen him. I made him take a stiff glass of brandy and change his things."

Corbett looked up, his mouth full. "Change his things?"

Merton answered: "He must have got up in the night, if he ever went to bed. I think he opened his window to get more air."

"It was damned sultry," said Corbett.

"But even then—" began Andrews.

Merton shrugged. "At any rate he got wet. Perhaps he leaned out. You know he was in such a state last night."

Mary looked at the speaker. "Oh, poor thing! But what happened to him this morning?"

"No one quite knows," he replied. "I heard a thud

and ran out. He was lying on the floor of the passage. A faint, of course."

The sun was shining outside and the air was beautifully warm. Mary was seized with an impulse to get away from this house, from this disquieting company. She pushed back her chair, left the room, and out by the front door, which was wide open. Here she turned into a gravel path and walked down it beside the lawns.

When she had gone, Cramish turned to Brown: "Was it suicide, do you think?"

Brown shrugged. He seemed changed since the night before. He was less rubicund, his mustache seemed almost to droop, and there was a dazed look in his eyes. But all that, of course, might have been the result of the shock of hearing that the crash threatened to rob him of two-thirds of his income.

"They found the dagger."

Smith spoke across the table. "It was a poniard from that trophy in the library. That's what I don't like about it."

They all turned to stare at him.

"What do you mean?" asked Colper abruptly.

"What I say. You know what a dickens of a racket there was last night. You might as well try to go to sleep in a printing machine room."

"I slept," said Corbett laconically.

"Then you were dashed lucky. I had had a glimpse into the library before dinner, and I saw a book on 'Beet Farming.' I remembered it after I went to bed."

"But there are books in every room," said Merton.

"Novels. I don't read novels! I stuck it as long as I could, and almost got to know that bally book about this house by heart. Then I went down to the library and got the book I had seen."

There was silence for a few minutes. Then Lord Cramish spoke.

"Did you put it back again?"

"Rather. This morning."

"Humph. I shouldn't mention it just yet. But I suppose you saw no one walking about the house?"

"Not a soul. I thought I heard a footstep later, but I guessed it was some chap like myself who couldn't sleep for the noise."

Colper thrummed with one finger on the table. "And the dagger came from the library, you say?"

Smith glared at him. Major Brown struck in.

"No use talking about that, is there? Fellow who used a dagger wouldn't leave it about, I think—finger-prints on the handle and so on."

"You mean suicide," said Andrews.

"But the window was open," said Corbett. "Wide open; I saw it myself."

There were the faint sounds of a car from outside. Cramish got up.

"I expect that's the doctor. It's too early to have the police from Hindon."

Chapter V

SUPERINTENDENT COBHAM THROWS TONGUE

FROM the window Clive Merton saw Mary Glenne cross the end of a lawn and turn towards a path leading back to the farther wing of the house. He stared at her for a moment, biting his lip dubiously, then left the house and joined her in the garden.

When he came up, she was staring at a figure that showed itself before an open window on the first floor. It was that of Mand. He had his back to the window, and beyond him for a moment Clive and Mary had a glimpse of the doctor.

"I wonder what really happened?" said Mary.

"Hard to say," replied Clive in a low voice.

She drew a deep breath. "I do hope they won't think that poor old man had anything to do with it."

"Logard? Why should they?"

His voice was indifferent, but the eyes fastened now on her face were keen enough. She looked up at him.

"He was half mad last night, you know. I thought it was awful when he said it was the appointed time in that dreadful voice. Even if he did do it, they couldn't call it murder, could they?"

"How could he do it?" asked Clive, without answering her last question. "He's an old man."

She nodded. "I don't know. I was wondering. You see, there is a ledge along under the windows, and the professor's window was open, they say. And Mr. Cupolis's window was open."

"You mean that he could climb along? Perhaps he could. But the mere possibility isn't enough. Please don't suggest that to any one else."

"I won't," she said, "but you see what I mean. I know we were all very angry with Cupolis. I know two or three made threats. But I don't think they would murder the man, do you? That poor old thing wouldn't either, in his sober senses."

Clive bit his lip again. "We'll have to leave that to the police, I'm afraid. Let us hear instead how you stand. I know we may all get something, for there must be assets of some kind, but how much it is impossible to judge. If I can help you to put in your claim later, or find out for you what had best be done—"

"It's very good of you, but I couldn't think of troubling you," she said, gratefully but hastily. "I am sure my father wouldn't either. But I do appreciate your thought for us."

He shrugged. "Well, if it is necessary, I trust you will think better of it. We may all be detained here for some time, but I shall give you my address before we leave."

"Thank you," she said. "Do you mean that they may suspect us?"

He nodded. "I am afraid we shall all be more or less under suspicion."

They could not say more, for Smith came hurrying out to them to say that Mand wanted to see them in the library. They followed him to find the secretary talking to some of the other members of the party. When they came in, he stood a little away from the nearest group and addressed them in a slow and nervous voice.

"I am sorry that, to add to the trouble of last night, it will be necessary for you all to remain here until the police allow you to go," he announced. "I heard ten minutes ago over the telephone from the chief constable. He is on his way here and spoke from one of the A.A. booths."

"Too bad!" said Corbett explosively.

Mand looked at him deprecatingly. "I am sorry, but what can I do?—In the meantime the doctor has made an examination of the body, and is of opinion that death was caused by a wound in the heart, inflicted by a sharp pointed instrument. From the position of the wound he says that it might have been self-inflicted. On the other hand, from the comatose state in which he found Cupolis last night, due to drugging, he does not feel prepared to swear that it is a case of suicide. The post-mortem may help. I thought it better to tell you this, since you are all naturally anxious to get away."

"Even dead, the man's a trouble to us," said Smith.

Mand nodded, but shrugged. "Well, there it stands. You must be prepared to stand fire when the superintendent comes. I asked the chief constable if he intended calling in Scotland Yard. It appears that he doesn't."

"Absurd!" cried Cramish angrily. "Heaven knows what these country police won't do."

"Well, it is in the hands of the chief constable, and you will have to speak to him," said Mand apologetically. "I think I hear a car now, and must leave you."

Two cars had drawn up opposite the main door. The first car was a private one and contained Captain Shardel, the chief constable for the county, and two other men. The first was tall, genial, with a face that seemed to be always failing to suppress a smile. This was Superintendent Cobham of the Hindon police. The second was a small, slight, grave man; Sergeant Smith of the Hindon detective force.

Behind them was a police car. It carried, in addition to the official chauffeur, a thin man with a large camera, his assistant with a big bag, and the police surgeon. Mand received the newcomers, and led Shardel, Cobham and the surgeon to the dead man's room.

"What's this about a crash?" asked Shardel as they went up the stairs. He was a military-looking fellow with an impassive face and an abrupt way of talking. "Thought he was rich as Crœsus."

Mand shook his head. "It's true. We have nine

guests here, and it was a great shock to them. They are all shareholders."

"Poor devils!" said Shardel. "By the way, no one has touched him, eh?"

"Only his own doctor here, whom I called in."

"Has he gone again?"

"No. As a matter of fact I asked him to have a look at one of the guests, an elderly professor, who was much affected by the shock last night.—Ah, here he is.—Doctor, you know Captain Shardel, I think?"

The doctor knew most of them, and exchanged a word or two with the police surgeon, who nodded intelligently. The whole party then entered the room.

To the surprise of the police surgeon the body of Mr. Cupolis was still lying over the window sill, where it had been found. He was about to go up to it when the superintendent intervened.

"Odd this, gentlemen. If the wound is in the breast he must have been moved. That is unfortunate. Very! Doctor," he turned to the regular physician, "I wish you had left him alone. But in any case we can't have him moved again until photographs have been taken of his position. I suppose it is relatively the same as when he was first discovered?"

"I was very careful," said the doctor, rather grumpily.

"I hope you were," said Cobham. "Some day we shall have to circularize the whole population of these

isles and inform them that a dead body must not be moved in a case of this kind."

Captain Shardel, who was a hunting man, used to say that the only fault he found with Cobham was his tendency to throw tongue on the least provocation, and what was worse, to keep on throwing it. A hound you shot, but a superintendent of police was not so easily to be disposed of. Besides, he liked the man, and had found him keen, clever and painstaking.

"All right, Cobham," he said; "let's have up the camera fellow. Any weapon found, Mr. Mand?"

Mand indicated a side table on which lay an ancient poniard, the handle wrapped in tissue paper. "There it is. I took care to put paper round the handle before I picked it up."

They all looked at it. Cobham picked it up, measured the blade with a long span, and found it about seven inches. He laid it down again.

"Well, we'll adjourn till the photographs are taken. Let me see.—Who found the body, Mr. Mand, and when?"

Mand had left the door open, and they trooped out, himself coming last with the superintendent.

"A footman, Jenkins," he said.

"We'll see him first."

The doctor was deep in resentful talk with the police surgeon as they proceeded to the billiard room where they were to hold their conference. He had explained

what he had seen on examining the body, and his younger colleague had now to listen to an angry grumble with regard to the superintendent's manners.

Cobham suddenly spoke to him: "What about the sick guest, doctor?"

The doctor growled back: "Seems a bit senile to me. He's getting on, and the shock last night seems to have upset him. He has a bad cold too, through getting wet last night, it seems."

"Thank you," said Cobham, pricking up his ears. "By the way, if you have a round of patients to visit, I don't think we shall need you just now, sir. Unless you are anxious to stay."

"I'm not!" the other snapped at him. "Captain Shardel, if I am needed, I hope you will let me know." And he stamped off to get his hat, and vanish with acerbity.

The photographer and his assistant were taken upstairs by Sergeant Smith, and Shardel, Cobham, Mand and the police surgeon entered the billiard room and closed the door. They sat down and Shardel opened the ball.

"Now, Mr. Mand, before the footman comes, let us hear what happened. The crash in Cupolis's affairs was not in the papers until this morning. Evidently the guests heard. Who told them?"

Mand explained about the note he had received, his call for the doctor, and the disclosure about the drug-taking. As he finished, the footman came in, looking

upset and nervous, and looked anxiously at the chief constable.

"Jenkins, footman?" asked Shardel.

"Yes, sir."

Shardel stared at him and Cobham took up the tale. "No need to be frightened by us, Jenkins. We know you merely found the body. When was this?"

"I was taking up his morning tea, sir, about half-past seven," said the man. "He never locked his door, and I knocked and went straight in."

"Where did you find him?"

The man looked pale. "Half out across the window sill, sir. I thought he was looking down at something below, till I noticed he never moved. Then—then I saw some blood, and I ran out."

"You didn't touch him, or try to move him?"

"No, sir."

"Does Mr. Cupolis, I mean did he, always have his window open? There did not seem to be much rain on the floor."

"He does usually on hot nights, sir, though not always."

"A foreigner; they don't always," commented Shardel briefly.

"Was it shut last night?"

"It was," replied Mand. "I went up last, I think, and it was shut then."

Cobham nodded. "Very good. What happened when you ran out?"

"Some of the gentlemen in the house came out of their rooms, sir, and the old gentleman he fell flat and made an odd noise."

"The professor?"

"Yes, sir. The gentlemen attended to him. Then Mr. Mand here came up and went into the room, and Lord Cramish.—I was upset, sir, and went downstairs."

"Naturally enough. I think that will do for the present, Jenkins."

Jenkins went out, relieved, and Cobham turned to Mand. "I see you were the next to view the body after Jenkins?"

Mand nodded. "I went in to find him in very much the same position as now. I could see that he was dead and did not touch him. I, however, saw the poniard on the floor and picked that up, after taking the precautions I told you about."

"Very wise too, sir. Then I suppose you locked the door until the doctor arrived?"

"Yes. That is what I did."

"Can you tell me the names of the guests here and when they arrived? Also if they all sleep in rooms off this passage?"

"All of them, except Mr. Clive Merton. He had a room next to mine in the other wing. They all came together yesterday before dinner."

"Damned impudence of Cupolis to invite 'em down just to tell them he'd lost their money!" said Shardel.

"I can't understand it," agreed Mand, "unless his mind was already unbalanced."

The superintendent pursed his lips. "Who sleeps in the two bedrooms adjoining to either side?"

"Miss Glenne occupied the one and Professor Logard the other."

"That the gentleman who was so upset? Senile, the doctor said—a pretty word for being off your head, isn't it?"

Mand did not amplify the point. "That is the gentleman."

"And now he has a cold because he got wet? The storm did not break early here, did it?"

"No. I can only conclude that the old man found the room stuffy, with the windows closed, and opened them to get some air."

Shardel looked at Cobham and raised his eyebrows significantly. "I think you had better have a look at the old fellow," he remarked to the police surgeon. "Go up now. You can tell him you are the other chap's assistant if you like."

The surgeon left the room. Cobham began again. "Yes, that is rather strange. He must have got very hot. I understand what he felt. It was stuffy everywhere during the storm. I did not sleep very well myself. But I can't imagine an old man sticking out of the window, or at the window, long enough to get really wet. He *was* really wet, I suppose?"

Mand nodded ruefully. Captain Shardel shrugged and put a question.

"This Miss Glenne. What age is she? What kind of woman?"

"Pretty and young," said Mand. "Her father is, or was, an army officer, retired from wounds, I imagine."

"Why the dickens did Cupolis invite one woman among so many men?"

Mand bit his lip. "I can't say."

Cobham struck in. "We have heard about drugs just now. That explains lots of things. Addicts aren't like other people. We know that— Come in!"

This last because there was a knock at the door, and the invitation was followed by the person of Sergeant Smith, who had been investigating in the grounds after leading the photographers to the dead man's room.

"What is it?" said Cobham. "Don't tell me you have found a clew already?"

The sergeant's grave face had a faint look of triumph. "I may have, sir. I found the marks of two booted feet on the flower-bed under the window."

They all jumped up. Captain Shardel whistled shortly. "Good man! We'll have a look at that now. You're hot stuff, Smith!"

"Thank you, sir," said the sergeant, as they all left the billiard room and hurried out of the house.

Chapter VI

THE SCRATCHES

WHEN they approached the flower-bed under the dead man's window, Cobham made Mand stand back and advanced gingerly in company with the chief constable and Smith. There were two not very deep footprints in the soil, the marks of smallish feet.

Cobham studied them carefully, instructed Smith to make casts of both, then returned to the house. They went upstairs then and found that the camera experts had photographed the body and the room from every angle, and were packing up. Cobham dismissed them, asked the surgeon, who had now come in from seeing Professor Logard, to examine the body, and began to make certain measurements and study the lie of the place.

"By the way," he began, as he knelt on the floor extending a steel tape, "what's up next door? What do you call it?"

The surgeon looked up. "Logard? He's had a serious shock and is rambling a bit. I should think it has thrown him off his mental balance. But I imagine he must have been worse last night than he is now."

"Is he mad or anything like it?"

The surgeon shook his head. "One couldn't say

definitely without keeping him under observation for some time. I should say not. I take him to be a man of sheltered life—these donnish fellows are—who got a knock his nerves weren't prepared for."

He turned over Cupolis's body as he spoke and prepared to make his examination. Captain Shardel looked at Mand.

"Is that so? According to your account, he was in the music room that night—last night. How did he act? Was he excited?"

"Somewhat," said Mand slowly.

"What does that mean?" demanded the other impatiently. "How did he show it. Was he more excited than the others?"

"They were all excited and shocked. I suppose he was."

"Come! How do you suppose he was? You couldn't think he was more excited than the others unless you saw it."

"He shouted something, and wanted to run upstairs," said the secretary reluctantly.

"Well, why didn't you say so? Tell the truth and shame the devil, man! No one is likely to think an elderly professor got up and walked on the flower-beds below, prior to going in again, and killing the man who swindled him!"

"I forgot the footprints," said Mand apologetically.

The surgeon turned suddenly. "Cupolis wasn't in this position when he was stabbed," he said.

Shardel looked at him. "I never supposed a man could stab himself in the chest while he was leaning it on a window sill, my dear fellow."

The surgeon smiled faintly. "I mean he wasn't facing the window when he was stabbed."

"How can you know that?"

"Because of the blood. No doubt he turned round after he had received the blow. And a man in his state would naturally turn to the window for air."

Cobham got up. He had appeared to pay no attention to what the others were saying, so absorbed had he seemed in his own work, but he had heard every word all the same.

"How high is this window from the ground?" he asked.

"About twelve feet," said Mand. "Maybe a little more."

The superintendent opened the window wider and, avoiding the body, leaned out.

"Ha, I thought I saw a ledge below when we came up the drive. There's a small channel, too, in the lip of it. That was either for ornament or to carry off water. I think I had better get down and see."

Shardel and the doctor also looked down at the ledge. It projected about eighteen inches.

"Quite practicable," said Cobham, lowering himself over and being careful not to step on the ledge in the middle.

Mand had come to look too, and now called out:

"Is that a mark on the lip? But it couldn't have been made by a foot—the stone is too hard."

Cobham saw the marks simultaneously. He pulled out a magnifying glass and studied them.

"Three marks—scratches—too deep for boot nails. Give me a hand up."

Mand looked excited now. Captain Shardel patted him on the back. "It looks as if your old professor needn't worry," he said good-humoredly.

"But what does it mean if they didn't come from boot nails?" the other asked.

Cobham smiled. "I should say those were marks made by the points of a fine grapnel, sir," he explained to the chief constable. "Quite a number of cat burglars have a light rope they can sling up and hook on."

"That suggests an outsider," said Shardel rapidly. "We must get as many men out combing the country as we can, and at once. I'll go down and telephone now."

He hurried away. The surgeon had completed his examination.

"Stabbed to the heart all right," he said. "It looks as if that fellow on the table there did it."

"Where did it come from?" asked Cobham, looking at Mand.

"From a trophy of old arms in the library."

Cobham raised his eyebrows. "Any one of the guests know, sir, that there were arms in the library?"

"It is difficult to say. No doubt some of them have been in there."

Superintendent Cobham was one of those irritating men who draw examples of conduct from their own daily lives. And he was frequently right!

"I had a go at Scott last night," he remarked thoughtfully. "My wife didn't like it. She can never bear a light when she is asleep, though it was only a candle. But the storm was responsible and I told her so. We'll have a look in the library now."

"By the way," said the police surgeon. "There's the p.-m. and there'll be the inquest.—Here?"

Cobham looked at Mand. "What do you say, sir?"

"It may be convenient," said Mand. "There is no other convenient place near at hand, and you have all the witnesses here."

"Right. I think I'll get the shirty old fellow who attended Cupolis to come up. We don't want him to make trouble at the inquiry."

Mand supplied the telephone number and they went out. The surgeon went to telephone. The chief constable also left to give instructions for a search in the neighborhood. A good many tramps used the road between Tendon Mocket and Hindon, and any suspicious strangers who might have been seen in the district would also require to be traced and questioned.

When they were in the library Mand showed the superintendent the trophy of arms. Cobham nodded

and turned to the bookshelves. He ran his eye along shelf after shelf and presently stopped.

"Careless. Careless!" he said. "You don't keep a librarian, Mr. Mand?"

"No. Cupolis wasn't bookish.—Why?"

"Some one's put in a book upside down here. A careless man, or a man in a hurry. Odd kind of bed book too—farming." He looked very intelligent, and Mand hastened to say that he remembered one of the guests, a gentleman farmer, had told them he had taken a book from the library.

"Ah," said Cobham, "I hope *his* wife wasn't disturbed. But surely there are books in the bedrooms in a house like this?"

"Only novels," said Mand. "He doesn't read them."

Cobham examined the trophy next. Mand perhaps expected that he would go over it very minutely. But Cobham did not even apply his pocket magnifier to the trophy. He took no more than a minute, replaced it shrugging a little, then turned to his companion.

"I think I shall see Sergeant Smith now," he murmured.

"I hear him coming," said Mand, who had sharp ears.

Sergeant Smith emerged from a passage and approached them. "Any instructions, sir?" he asked.

"Yes. I have another job for you. Get hold of all the pyjamas and night garments and examine them for

bloodstains; no one excepted.—Let me see, Mr. Mand, who is the gentleman who slept in the room next yours —that is, the farthest away from the scene of the crime — Oh, I remember; Mr. Merton. I want him to come out with me. You, as the gentleman in charge here, had better go with Sergeant Smith to explain to the guests and servants that they must show all their stock of nightgear, not only the garments they say they had on last night. It looks as if the criminal came from outside, but we can't afford to overlook anything."

"If you are going out, I'll send Merton to you," said Mand, and turned away to accompany Sergeant Smith.

His superior having gone away in the car, Superintendent Cobham went to the front door and lighted a cigarette. While he stood there reflecting, and now no longer repressing his famous smile, the photographer and his assistant came up ready to go.

Cobham waved them on. "Good light for your job, eh? That's right. I shall expect to have good copies too.—Tell Cope to buzz you back to work as fast as he can."

They nodded, climbed into the police car, and whirled off. Merton came up to Cobham and introduced himself. The superintendent gave him a quick glance.

"Thank you for coming, sir," he said with that geniality malefactors hated in him, and which he poured

alike on the just and the unjust. "There's a lot to do, and not so much time to do it in, and, as I always say, two birds with one stone taste better. I'm going to see if I can trace some footprints we found."

"Outside?" asked Merton, who began to think the superintendent was a champion gasbag. "That's important."

"Possibly," said Cobham, starting out. "Now, sir, as we go along I should like your version of what happened last night. I hear the old professor went in off the deep end, and one or two of the others were turning nasty about it. Natural enough, as far as it goes. But I don't want that. Let me hear what you did on leaving the library."

Clive Merton followed him on to the lawn. "I saw Miss Glenne as far as the door of her room, then I went to my own, which is next Mr. Mand's in the other wing. I took off my clothes and put on my pyjamas and a dressing-gown. I couldn't sleep for the noise, so I read the souvenir book Cupolis gave his guests, and a novel when I was tired of that."

They were now below the window of the dead man's room, and Cobham pointed down. "A smallish foot, and not a very deep imprint, sir. Now your feet are a good deal larger, if you will allow me to say so without offense. 'Nine,' I should say, sir?"

Clive laughed involuntarily. "Right, superintendent. Nine it is."

Cobham nodded. "You read until you were tired.

You didn't go down to the library by any chance?"

"No."

"May I ask the name of the novel you read. I'm fond of novels. I always like to hear of a good one."

"It was called *The Man Boat*," Clive told him.

"Ah, a sea story. I like that kind."

"As a matter of fact the name was symbolical," said Clive, who was now sure his companion was a fool. "It referred to men going on with their lives apart from sentiment."

"Wasn't there a woman at all in it, sir?"

"Yes, of a kind. She kept lodgings for bachelors, and her humor seasons the book."

Cobham suddenly seemed to recollect that he had a great deal to do and little time to do it in. "Let us have a look at the flower-bed under the other wing, if there is one," he said, and went off at a great pace.

When Clive caught up with him again, he was standing near the flower-bed under Clive's own bedroom window.

"Which is yours, sir?" he asked. "But, of course, having only arrived last night, you wouldn't know from the outside. Will you run up and let me see which it is."

Clive hurried away. Cobham bent down and stared at some marks he saw on the bed. He was stepping back again when a window opened above and Clive's head was thrust out.

Cobham looked up. "Ah, that it? Which way is Mr. Mand's?"

Clive pointed to the window to the right. "This."

"Thank you, sir. Will you come down again, and please bring that book with you."

He grinned to himself as Clive's head disappeared. He was going to make sure that Clive had read that book through. The finger-prints where he turned the leaves would not only attest that, but in themselves might be useful for identification. When Clive joined him with the book, Cobham pointed at the two foot-prints he had been examining, and took the book absent-mindedly with his free hand.

"Do you make those the same size as the others, sir?"

Clive started and stared. "I think so. They look much the same. How did you know they would be here?"

"I didn't, sir. I have been keeping my eye on the flower-beds as we came along, that's all."

"But it isn't under my window."

"No, sir. Mr. Mand's. If Mr. Mand took this size in boots, we should do nicely. Unfortunately, he is a big man, with a foot larger than yours. He couldn't let himself down from a window on wet soil without making a hole and a half."

"Oh, I see. Of course you have to suspect every one."

"Absolutely, sir."

"I could have supplied you with some information," said Clive, smiling. "I didn't get to sleep. Mand did. He snored horribly. I thought at first he was as bad as the storm. When the wind went down and the rain was over, I am glad to say he stopped."

Cobham had a last puff at his cigarette and threw it away.

"Hard luck, sir. Well, we'll see Mr. Mand now and ask him a thing or two. Sergeant Smith will have to make other casts of these footprints. You see, we found grapnel marks on the ledge under Cupolis's window. But why are there no marks on the intervening beds?"

"Heaven knows," said Clive, uncomfortably, as he accompanied him back to the house.

Mand was by himself in the hall.

Cobham button-holed him. "I say, sir, do you always sleep in the same room; the one you slept in last night?"

Mand stared. "No, not always. I have used it lately."

"Is it empty when you do not use it?"

"No. That's a curious thing to ask though. Sometimes Mr. Cupolis used to sleep there—in fact, it was his room till two weeks ago. He had his furniture moved out and mine moved in."

"Thank you," said Cobham. "Has Smith got all the garments he wanted, sir?"

"Yes, he has spread them out in the billiard room and is busy examining them."

"Good!" said Cobham. "By the way, we found footprints in the bed under your window. Mr. Merton will tell you about them. Would you mind telling Mr. —Mr. Andrews that I should like to see him? I shall be in the library."

Chapter VII

THE ORDEALS

SUPERINTENDENT COBHAM settled himself in an easy-chair in the library with his back to the light. He ran through the pages of the novel quickly, his eyes taking in a paragraph here and there. He put it down when Andrews came into the room, asked him to be seated opposite, and smiled reassuringly. "This is a nasty business for all of you, I'm afraid, sir. First you get that nasty news, and now the murder and my unpleasant job of asking you questions."

"It's a wretched affair altogether," said Andrews, who looked miserable.

"And I suppose you have lost a great deal in this crash, sir."

"Much more than I can afford to lose. If I cannot recover a good deal out of the estate, I am afraid I shall have to struggle to get clear."

Cobham looked sympathetic. "I am sorry, sir. I suppose you don't know that this place won't be an asset? I understand that Cupolis took it furnished from Sir Burpham Green."

Andrews swore. He had thought the place would be realized and provide some salvage for the unfortunate creditors.

"That's how it is, sir," said Cobham. "Now I want

to know if you slept last night, and if you heard any sounds in the house you thought at all suspicious."

Andrews reflected, his eyes anxious. "No. I didn't very much—sleep, I mean. I was worked up about the affair, even if there hadn't been a storm. It's a facer for me."

"Were you one of the gentlemen who went in off the deep end in the music room?"

"No. I felt like it though. Dead or not, Cupolis was a damned scoundrel. Being dead doesn't make him any better."

"I quite understand your feelings, sir. By the way, you all got invitations from Mr. Cupolis. Have you any idea why he asked you down here simply to tell you, or let you know, that he had ruined you? Why especially should he have picked a few from all the shareholders?"

"I don't know. I call it an infernal outrage. But he could not put up a hundredth of the shareholders here anyway."

"No.—You did not sleep, but you did not leave your room last night or hear any noise outside?"

"Neither. But unless it was a big noise the storm was so high and I was so absorbed trying to decide on my future course of action, that I wouldn't have heard it."

Cobham smiled again. "Thank you, sir. Don't worry about this. If you see the butler, send him in to me, will you? Thanks. Much obliged."

Andrews went out. Cobham wrote in his notebook: "Shoes about size eight," and then fell to humming softly until the butler came in. He looked up then.

"Ah, that room Mr. Mand sleeps in now. Who had it before?"

The butler started. "Mr. Cupolis, sir."

"Thank you. Will you ask Major Brown to see me here, please."

"Yes, sir."

When the butler went out, the superintendent hummed again. It was his way when alone and reflecting. "Oh, dry those tears," was the burden of his song at the moment.

It ceased when Major Brown came in.

The retired officer had pulled himself together since breakfast time. He nodded abruptly to the official and took a chair. The superintendent had risen to receive him and still stood.

"Just a question or two, sir. In the first place I understand that you were unfortunate enough to invest in Mr. Cupolis's companies."

"I was. Infernal fool!"

"Your investment being pretty large, sir, may I ask?"

"You may. It was! Too damned large to be comfortable."

"Now, how about last night, sir. You went up with the others. Did the storm keep you awake?"

Major Brown shrugged. "Not long. Man in my old job is used to noise."

"So you heard nothing suspicious outside in the passage, sir?"

"Don't hear noises when I am asleep."

"And you did not leave your room, sir?"

"Don't do that either when I am asleep."

Cobham smiled. "Very satisfactory, sir. Thank you. I don't think I have any more questions at the moment."

"Very good," said the major, got up, nodded stiffly, and went out with his military walk.

Cobham watched his feet as he crossed the floor. Then he began to hum "Ché faro" rather off the note, and wrote again in his notebook. "Nearer the size. About six or seven—nearer six than seven. A neat foot."

He rang for the butler, asked for Mr. Colper, and sat down. Colper was some time coming, and when he did come he was in a cold temper and decidedly resentful.

"What the dickens have I to do with it?" he demanded. "I was not aware that anything had happened."

"Quite so, sir. Won't you sit?—The law has its little ways, sir, and nothing changes them. Do sit down, sir, and let me hear how you spent last night after going to your room."

But Colper obstinately stood. "I undressed and went to bed, as all sensible people do," he said acidly.

Cobham was imperturbable. "An excellent practice,

sir. I expect the heat of the night, not to speak of the storm, kept you awake a good deal?"

"I slept off and on."

"Did you leave your room, or did you hear any sounds which suggested that some one else had left theirs?"

"I did not leave my room until I heard the noise of that hysterical old man falling about in the passage. And I did not hear any suspicious sounds in the night."

"You think Professor Logard is hysterical?" asked Cobham in an interested voice.

"He went on like a damned fool in the music room anyway," said Colper sourly.

"You are a considerable shareholder in the companies of Mr. Cupolis?"

"Absolutely. He got what he deserved in my opinion."

Cobham nodded. "Thank you, sir. I wonder if you would mind asking Mr.—er—Corbett to step this way?"

"I'll tell him if I see him," said Colper ungraciously as he turned to go.

"Nines at least." That was what Cobham wrote in his book this time. He was humming "Sweet Dreamland Faces" when Corbett strode heavily into the room.

"What's the racket?" he demanded, facing the official with a dour face. "Want to know if I killed

Cupolis, eh? Glad to, if I had had the chance. I didn't get it! Some wise fellow anticipated me."

"But you had money in these shows, sir?"

"Quite a lot of tin. That's why I am not weeping to-day."

"How did you sleep last night, sir?"

"Tophole. I always do. It's a habit and no credit to me."

Cobham nodded, asked the two questions he intended to put to all the guests, and received a reply in a decidedly negative tone.

He asked Corbett to send in Mr. Smith, marked his book "Tens, and large at that," and hummed again.

Mr. Smith came in with the step of Agag. He looked ill and he was obviously uneasy. He looked still more uneasy when Cobham told him to sit down and began:

"I understand that you are a gentleman farmer, sir, and interested in sugar beet."

Smith started. "A farmer certainly. But I don't grow beet."

"Perhaps not, sir, but you may want to some day. I expect that is why you took that book from the library last night." He raised a hand as Smith began a question. "No, sir. I found that book upside down and inquired."

"There were only novels in my room," said Smith hastily. "I told Mand I had gone down in the night to get the book. I couldn't sleep for the storm and

the heat, and I was worried by what I had just heard."

"I can quite understand that, sir. Most people would have been in your place. Got a mortgage on your farm, may I ask?"

"Yes—er—I have. Why?"

"So that this crash will be very unpleasant for you?"

"I am sorry to say it will."

"Do you know at what time you left your room?"

"I did not look. It was latish certainly. The storm was not as bad as it got later, but it was growing after the first lull."

"I see. No one in this house seems to have any sense of time."

Smith looked at him suspiciously. If it was not a joke, it meant something. If it was a joke, it was not at this time the right thing on the lips of a policeman.

"I opened my door very quietly and went along the passage," he said.

"How did you know your way so well about a strange house at night, eh, sir?"

Smith shrugged. "We had a book given us about the house. It has all the plans. I was bored stiff reading it before I went down to the library."

"I see. Now I suppose you did not know that any one else was about the house? You saw no one going or coming; you heard no one?"

"I saw no one. When I had got back I thought I heard a noise like a step, but I am not sure."

"Did you use threats with regard to the dead man when you were in the music room last night and heard of the crash? Now, sir, think and speak carefully."

Smith looked afraid. "I did. I said I would like to take a whip to him. But others said much the same. In the heat of the moment, you know—"

Cobham interrupted. "That's understood. Now I am about to ask you a question which you are at liberty to refuse to answer. Did you take down a poniard, or ancient dagger, from the trophy on the wall of the library?"

Smith spoke decidedly. "No. Never! I saw the trophy. But I never touched a dagger. Heavens, man! Some one told me there were footprints outside. Surely you must see what that means."

"Where does your bedroom lie, Mr. Smith?"

"Next to Colper's and Andrew's, on the side of the passage facing Cupolis's door."

Smith spoke rather defiantly. Cobham sucked in his lips, reflected for a moment, and smiled faintly.

"If I were living in this house, sir, and went outside, you might find my footprints there. It does not prove that I did not live here or sleep here."

"I suppose you would jump out of the window," said Smith bitterly.

"I might let myself down by a rope," said Cobham. "Thank you, sir. I shouldn't worry myself too much if I were you."

"I don't suppose you would. But you haven't lost a lot of money you can't spare."

"True, sir," said Cobham. "Will you kindly ask Lord Cramish to speak to me here?"

Smith did not reply. Cobham wrote "Nines" in his book. He appeared to be an expert in boots. Then he sat humming "Come into the garden, Maud!" until Lord Cramish came in with a short, quick step.

"Want me, superintendent?" he asked, businesslike, and more composed than the others.

Cobham rose. "Will you take a seat, my lord. I have to ask you a few questions. An unpleasant necessity I am sure you will understand."

Cramish sat down, crossing his legs and cocking up one foot, at which the superintendent stared.

"I understand. Carry on, please."

Cobham put to him the questions he had put to the others. He received what he called an average reply. Cramish had not left his room. He had not heard any one moving. He had slept rather badly.

"Where do you sleep, my lord?" asked the other.

"I was in the room next to Professor Logard."

The keen eyes were riveted on Lord Cramish's face. "There is a consensus of opinion that the professor got up in the night and opened his window. Did you hear that?"

"No."

"Did you hear any sounds from that direction which might suggest that the old man in a sort of frenzy got

out and descended or possibly climbed out on to the ledge?"

Cramish's frosty gray eyes surveyed him carefully and long. "I had my own windows shut. I did not hear anything of the kind. Are you hinting that the old man crept along the ledge and killed Cupolis in a frenzy caused by the news of the crash?"

Cobham's look was as dry as his own. "I am not hinting at anything, my lord. I am asking you questions. But as you bring up that hypothetical point, may I ask if the professor's manner last night was strange enough to suggest that he had gone temporarily off his head?"

There was a sort of veiled antagonism in the eyes of both now. But then Cramish had not a very ingratiating manner, and also was apt to resent any remark in the nature of a reproof, however mild.

"Well, superintendent, you have been good enough to inform me that you are not asking for statements but merely putting questions. I accept that. I refuse to be drawn into any speculations. I am neither an alienist nor a physician."

"Very good, my lord, I shall not press that. But may I ask if you stand to lose heavily in this crash?"

"I can't say. I don't know yet how the assets will pan out. I don't mind telling you I have invested between fifty and sixty thousand pounds."

"A big sum, my lord."

"Men have been killed for a tithe of it," said Cram-

ish deliberately. "Put down that statement if you like! I mean it. Personally, I think Cupolis got off lightly."

Cobham bowed. He knew that it would be said no murderer would make such a statement that might prejudice his case. He also knew that a subtle man might say that very thing, knowing the inference that would naturally be drawn from its frankness.

"Thank you, my lord. I think that is all for the present. I wonder if you would mind asking the only lady guest to come here; Miss Glenne, I think, is the name."

Cramish got up, an ironical smile on his lips. "Not at all. I'll tell her. We mustn't forget that she slept next to Cupolis, must we?"

He went out. Cobham did not make a note in his book this time.

"Thinks me a yokel without a head," he mused. "So much the better. Words were invented to hide thoughts, some one said. I'll give 'em plenty to go on with!"

As a rule, the tunes that he hummed as an aid to reflection were chance ones that came to his head unbidden. It may have been an association of ideas that made him hum "La donna é mobile" while waiting for Mary Glenne.

Chapter VIII

MERE PAPER

MARY GLENNE was talking to Colper when Lord Cramish informed her that she was required in the library. Colper had given her a gloomy and indignant version of his interview, so that she was rather fearful when she went to see Cobham. The superintendent, however, was all smiles, got her a chair, told her not to be afraid, and beamed genially on her as he began.

"I know, Miss Glenne, that all this will seem very tiresome to you. It is true you were in a room next to that where Mr. Cupolis slept, but no one is likely to think you killed him. The poorest kind of policeman knows that women very rarely use a weapon like a knife. The sex's horror of blood, I suppose. In any case I simply have to have your statement for a comprehensive report, and we will get it over as soon as possible, if you don't mind."

Mary smiled faintly. She liked his looks and his obvious sympathy. "I am ready to tell you the little I know."

"That's right. Now just tell me, in your own way and in your own time, what happened from your arrival

here last evening. I may put a supplementary question here and there as a matter of form."

Mary told him. When she had come to the night, and the storm, and the sound she had heard then, he held up his hand.

"You thought you heard it again? And going the same way?"

"I thought. It was not easy to say which way."

"Mr. Smith went to the library for a book, on his own admission. It couldn't have been he, if the footsteps were moving in the same direction on both occasions. Of course one foot might have been his. But no one else admits leaving his room."

She said nothing. Cobham reflected. Having left Mary Glenne to tell her own story, without putting specific questions with regard to Professor Logard, he had led her to speak naturally, and so to mention the old man's frenzy and the effect it had had upon her own nerves.

"Did you hear a window open or shut?" he asked presently.

"No. I could not swear to a sound like that. But you see the house was full of sounds. I mean the storm and all that."

"I know. We had the fringe of it at Hindon. Now, Miss Glenne, I am very sorry to hear this crash has affected you. Would it be correct to say that it is a serious loss?"

Tears came into her eyes. She wiped them away. "Very. But I do hope it is not all lost."

"I hope not indeed. But I think you will be wise to hope for the best and not think the worst. There may be assets we don't know of yet. In any case, I hope all will come out better than is feared. Thank you for the information you have given me. I shan't detain you any longer."

He got up, opened the door for her, and smiled her out. She wondered what Colper had found to grumble at in the polite policeman.

When she had gone, Sergeant Smith came in and saluted. "I should think I have gone through all the night garments, sir," he said. "Not one shows a speck even that looks like human blood."

Cobham nodded. "Doctor's upstairs, or has the body been removed?"

"It has been removed, sir, to a fine, light workshop there is outside, sir."

"Good. Then run up and bring me that dagger from the bedroom. Be careful not to remove the paper from the handle."

"Very well, sir," said Smith, and went at once.

When he came back with the dagger the superintendent was humming "We all go the same way home." He had on a pair of thin chamois leather gloves and had laid his magnifying glass on a table near him.

"Ah, that's the tool. Thank you."

He took the poniard, held it by the handle, and ex-

amined the blade very carefully through the magnifying glass.

The blade was stained and unpleasant to look at. But he looked at it very hard and long and then turned to Smith again.

"I don't know if our surgeon is busy out there. If he isn't, ask him to come in here and have a look at this."

The man who had assisted the official photographer was a member of Cobham's detective force. The superintendent, when he had taken that office five years before, had determined to do something to restore the prestige of at least one provincial force. He hoped that in future the Hindon detective officers would not figure in the comic papers as others had done. To that end he had brought their methods up to date, had some officers instructed in the finger-print system, others in photography, elementary chemistry, and other useful sciences. Aided by an intelligent chief constable, though grumbled at by the Police Committee of the town for needless expense, he had established a force that was well able to deal with any ordinary case. This extraordinary case would prove the touchstone.

The photographer's official assistant had searched for finger-prints, obtained a good many, and would now be engaged in reproducing them on an enlarged scale. Cobham thought of that as he waited for the police surgeon, who was some time coming.

He came at last and sat down by Cobham. "What

a love you have for gore, Cobham," he said cheerfully. "After you with the paper knife, if that is what you want me to look at."

Cobham passed it to him carefully, and also the magnifying glass. The surgeon looked at the weapon and then went away with it to a better light. Cobham followed him.

"You will observe that there are some tiny serrations, not on the edge as one might think natural, but on that rib that runs down the middle of the blade to the point."

"Nasty minds they had in the old days," said the other, still studying the weapon closely; "but these serrations are not like those on a saw bayonet. They are very minute and almost look more like a species of ornament than attempts to make an uglier wound."

"I agree," said Cobham; "but you don't see my point yet. Or do you?"

The surgeon looked up at him, grinned a little, and then glanced through the magnifying glass once more. "Wait a bit. You're sharper on points of one kind than I am. Hallo! Yes, yes! Cobham, you take the medal for medical research this year. I have pleasure in handing it to you."

Cobham beamed. "Don't think I'm glad! If this is as we think, it complicates the case tremendously. This is my first murder investigation, apart from homicides caused by drink, and it looks big enough already."

"Jove! It does!" cried the other, returning the glass, and the poniard. "There's blood on this blade, but nothing else. No tissue, no muscle fibers, nothing whatever. Was this a brain-wave, or what gave you the tip?"

Cobham smiled. "I don't know. I think I was struck at first by the sharpness and slenderness and then the length of the blade. It seemed to me that any kind of a decent blow delivered against the body of a man so lightly clothed as Cupolis would go right through him. Then when I was looking at the blade through the glass before you came, I wondered that those small serrations had not collected a fragment of flesh here and there."

"Absolutely. We believe, the other chap and I, that Cupolis was killed about one o'clock last night. We can guarantee that to half an hour. And we are both agreed that he was doped when he died and that he made no struggle."

"When he died, or before he died?"

"I mean before, of course. There are indications that he was an addict, but he had not gone very far with it. I think he only began using the stuff seriously during the last few months. He must have had a larger dose on going to his room yesterday, for the doctor here says he was in a stupor when he examined him."

"But he wrote that note to his guests."

"We don't know when he wrote that, Cobham. He

may have had it ready for some time. We do know that he gave it to the butler to give Mr. Mand. So he must have taken the stuff after dinner. By the way, if this poniard had been used, how would you have explained the footprints that were found on the flower-beds outside? The poniard would involve some one in the house."

"It might, though not necessarily. Of course, if we had not made this discovery, I should have been inclined to suspect that some one let themselves down from a window, then threw up a grapnel to Cupolis's window—at least the ledge under it. Mr. Merton sleeps next to Mr. Mand. Though he says he did not sleep at all last night, and he tells me Mand snores."

"But what has Mand to do with it?"

"We don't know that he has anything to do with it. I only said that because we found footprints under his window as well. We should have had to take them into account, you know."

The police surgeon looked at him thoughtfully. "You can't ignore them, it seems to me, whether the poniard was used or not. Why should there be prints under that second window?"

"It seems obvious enough if the poniard was not used, but something else," said Cobham promptly. "A man like Cupolis is bound to make enemies. Some one may have got wind of the coming crash earlier, perhaps asked Cupolis to cough up the money, and let that investor out in time. You see, the room now oc-

cupied by Mr. Mand used to be occupied by Cupolis. I have proof of that—independent evidence."

"I see. You mean that the fellow got no satisfaction out of the financier, scouted about here to find out where Cupolis slept, and last night had a go at first one window then another?"

"That at least is the theory. But if Mand was asleep and snoring he would not hear any one at his window."

"What about the storm?"

"This is in the other wing, my dear sir. Wind or rain doesn't as a rule beat on all sides of a house at the same time."

"No. Well?"

"Well, there were marks that might have been made by the points of a grapnel on the ledge under Cupolis's window. It seems to me we ought to look for similar marks on the ledge under Mand's window. If they are there, it would seem to prove that an outsider got up, found that the man sleeping there was not Cupolis, and went up to the other."

"If the financier was suspicious that some one was on his track," suggested the surgeon, "he might change his sleeping place."

"A good point," replied Cobham. "He might. Apart from the possibility of a disgruntled investor, the man was a Greek. No one seems to know much about his past, and there may have been an old feud in his own stormy land. Isn't it extraordinary how intelligent people, men with money and education, will

put their funds into the hands of adventurers, if they are only plausible enough."

"Isn't it funny that a girl will marry a man with whom she has only a short acquaintance," said the surgeon, who was an amateur philosopher; "it means losing everything sometimes."

"We'll have in Mand," said Cobham, crossing to the bell. "I shall ask him a question or two and then you can get back to your colleague."

When Mand came in a few minutes later the superintendent lost no time.

"I presume that you are not Mr. Cupolis's business secretary?" he asked.

"No," said Mand. "He didn't trust me about his business. I understand why now. I was more or less a social secretary."

"Do you snore?"

Mand started, then smiled. "What do you mean?"

Cobham permitted himself a faint smile. "Just that?"

"Exactly what I do not do," said Mand. "I was a bit of an athlete, you know. If the doctor here was to examine my nose and throat he would tell you, as my doctor used to tell me, that they were exceptionally free from obstructions. Then, snoring generally comes from lying on your back. Isn't it so, doctor?"

The surgeon smiled assent.

"And I never lie on my back. It isn't healthy. I lie on my right side and don't toss."

Cobham looked at the muscular figure and nodded. "I see. There is nothing odd about my question. Mr. Merton said you were snoring all night, or most of it."

Mand laughed. "He must have mistaken the thunder for my snore. Is that all?"

"Quite," said the superintendent.

When Mand had gone, the surgeon looked quizzically at his companion.

"It's a bold man who can swear he doesn't snore at any time," he said. "We all think we don't."

"A married man can always tell!" said Cobham, smiling. "He hears about it all right."

The surgeon grinned. "I suppose it isn't possible that Merton said that to appear as evidence that he was in his own room all night?"

"It might be. We can't rule out even little points like that. Further, if Mr. Mand wanted to prove that he had been in the same position, he would have eagerly accepted the evidence of his snoring. It would be a kind of noisy alibi!"

The surgeon stretched himself, gave a glance at the poniard, which was now lying on a side table, and agreed. "Well, I'll get back to my colleague. Shall I tell him about this?" He waved a hand.

"Not at present, please. I'm going for Smith, and we shall have a look at that ledge under Mand's window."

Chapter IX

THE MARKS OF THE BEAST

WHEN Cobham had found Sergeant Smith, they went up to Mand's room together and opened the window. The sergeant climbed out on to the ledge and examined it. He looked up at his superior after a few moments.

"Here they are, sir. Much like the others."

"Good! Any signs of a rope having been at all frayed on the edge of this cornice? It would be bound to lose some fibers with the weight of a man swaying on it."

The sergeant managed to bend down and examine the stone edge without overbalancing himself.

"No, sir, not a sign."

He came up again and Cobham went down. After two minutes the latter entered the window again.

"The rain, even if it did not beat on this side directly, must have been coursing along this edge and slopping over that little channel, Smith. The rush would be violent enough to carry off any fine vegetable fibers; fibers of silk too, I think."

"You think it may have been a silk rope or cord, sir?"

"Well, that is stronger and lighter for its size than

anything short of piano wire. And it is easier to cast up with a grapnel on it. Now this does seem to confirm the theory that a man first tried the window of one room where Cupolis used to sleep and then the other?"

He had already told the sergeant of the discovery with regard to the poniard, and the latter now brought it up again.

"Look here, sir. I quite see what you mean. I do think you are right. But that poniard bothers me. It does really. If it was not the weapon, why is it there at all? There was blood on it, but it had not been used for the stab. It wasn't even a weapon that an outsider brought with him as a second string."

"No, it came from the library."

"And if the man used a grapnel, and entered by the window, sir, it is unlikely that he would go down to the library to get another weapon before he attacked Cupolis. And how would he know the interior of the house, though he might have discovered in some way what were the windows of the rooms used alternately by Mr. Cupolis?"

"Very well reasoned, Smith," said Cobham, encouragingly, "but you forget that another shareholder might have been once invited to stay here, as this crowd below was. That reminds me, we must get a list from Mr. Mand of all the people who visited this house since Cupolis took it. We can get the full list of shareholders in town. It will be a long job to go through

that, but we can put Halte on that. He loves detail and works fast."

"Very well, sir. But you see my point. Why is the dagger found in that room at all?"

Cobham nodded. "There are several ways of accounting for that. We know that Cupolis took the opportunity of these unfortunate people staying here to announce his ruin, and theirs. Perhaps he intended to commit suicide. I don't know. We do know that the news burst like a bombshell among these unsuspecting guests. Some of them are practically done for, unless the estate proves to be more intact than I imagine."

"I know, sir."

"Very well. Among them is this old professor. You can tell from the other people's talk that he seemed a very mild, harmless, old man. He was not used to business; a donnish, sheltered individual, who had trusted a rogue with his savings, and suddenly heard that he was ruined. Last night, if Miss Glenne is correct, he became like a madman. Some one else says he was hysterical. Hysteria of that nature is akin to madness. He wanted to rush up to the dead man's room, and said something rather ominous and crazy about this being the appointed time. The other people saw he was not responsible and restrained him."

"I forgot him, sir."

"I did not. Now this morning he falls in the passage outside his door. They find him in a strange state and his pyjamas wet with rain. He explains that by

saying he opened a window to get air. But would he get those garments as wet as he did if he only opened the window? No. We might easily say that he climbed out, went along the ledge, and got into Cupolis's room."

"And killed him?" said the sergeant excitedly.

"We can neither accept that nor rule it out yet. He may have gone earlier to the library and concealed the poniard, going upstairs to his room with it. He may have arrived in the room occupied by Cupolis to find that the man was already dead. In that case he would be scared and upset, drop the poniard, and climb back to his own room. Then, this morning, when he realized what had happened, and what he had tried to do, he may have lost his head and become hysterical again."

"By Jove, sir! I believe you have it!" cried the sergeant.

Cobham shrugged. "But there are others. Among them is the fellow called Smith. He admits now that he went down to the library in the night. He puts a book upside down in the bookcase. There is Merton, who says Mand next door snores. Mand swears he never does. There is this fellow who looks like a bruiser and used threats last night about Cupolis. He says he slept all night, and that on top of a crash, and in the middle of a storm. My dear fellow, any one of these people may have gone up to pay Cupolis out, found themselves in the situation of the professor I

have just sketched out for you, and cleared out in a fright."

"At least that simplifies one thing," said the sergeant. "You are sure he was not murdered with the poniard. If the murder was committed by an outsider, it may not be difficult to trace one coming to Tendon Mocket by car or train. It's not tourist country round here, and strangers are noticed."

"Captain Shardel is organizing the search, and he will see to that. But I want you at once to telephone for Gregory, Sands and Hemp. I want every bit of the park examined as closely as it can be done. I don't need to tell you more. I want not only tracks, but anything in the nature of a weapon, a grapnel, or a rope, or cord. And you need not confine yourself to tracks of small feet in the park. A small sole and heel can be fitted to a larger boot, though, from the slight depth of the imprints in this case, I should say the trespasser was a light weight."

"He might be thin and tall, sir."

"He might."

As they were going down the stairs together, a servant came up to tell them that lunch was ready. Superintendent Cobham and the two doctors were to have theirs in the morning room: the butler had invited Sergeant Smith to be the guest of the servants' hall.

"I want you to examine all the servants afterwards, Smith," said Cobham, before he left his subordinate.

"Telephone for the other men now; get on to the servants when you have had lunch."

If there had been a little trouble with the regular physician before, there was none now. He was talking amicably with the police surgeon when Cobham entered and greeted the newcomer not unamiably.

"We have finished, I am glad to say, superintendent," he remarked, as the latter took his seat. "We both agree that Cupolis was in a drugged state when stabbed, that he was killed about one o'clock in the night, so that he had been about seven hours dead when discovered by the servant. What do you think about the inquest?"

"Captain Shardel is communicating with the coroner, sir. I think the day after to-morrow will be fixed for it. Luckily, we have all our witnesses here."

The doctor nodded. "A bad job for them. I thought at least one of them was not in possession of his senses last night. And his condition when I saw him this morning was that of a man who has had more than an ordinary shock. I don't like to suggest it, but if I were you I should keep a close eye on him."

"I have a close eye on a good many people at the present moment, sir. But I intend to have a little talk with Professor Logard after lunch. Do you think that would do him any harm?"

"No. Not if you are careful not to excite him too much. But don't be too sympathetic, on the other hand.

Treat him gently, but firmly curb any impulses to exaggerated self-pity in him. That sort of state is liable to develop into frenzy if encouraged."

"I'll remember what you say, sir."

The police surgeon looked up. "This morning's papers seem to think the crash will be a pretty big one. They say, though, that Cupolis never bought a house. Unless it was that villa abroad. He leased this, and the London one, furnished."

"Any sound financial firms involved, sir?" asked Cobham.

"They say not. It seems Cupolis's talents were most appreciated by individuals. Firms fought shy of him. He was a pretty good judge who to pick."

"I rather wondered," said Cobham. "I am not an expert in these matters, but it struck me I had never heard much about these companies. Do I understand you to mean that Cupolis did not so much trust to public subscriptions as to individuals he managed to get hold of and impress?"

"That's about it, I think," said Dr. Black. "He spoke to me once about this discovery he was exploiting, but I have no money to invest. I remember now the line he took."

"Do you? That is interesting. May I hear it?"

"Of course. He more or less suggested that thousands of big people would like to climb into it over his shoulders, but he was not going to let them. He in-

tended to let a few people he knew and liked in on what he called the 'ground-floor.'"

The police surgeon laughed. "He let them in all right."

"Now I see it," said the superintendent. "I must get a man on the job of looking into his companies in town. Mand is no good. He knows nothing about the business side."

"Isn't there a factory somewhere?" asked Dr. Black. "That should be worth something."

The police surgeon shrugged. "My paper says he has *half* a factory built, but I don't suppose that will pay off many of the creditors."

"I'll get Mand to get me a prospectus, if there is one," said Cobham. "I understand he lost a bit himself, so I expect he must at least have read the thing."

He sought out Mand after lunch, when the two doctors had gone, and asked him about the prospectus. Mand bit his lip.

"There were only enough details to satisfy the law. Cupolis got at us by making it a sort of snowball business. He convinced one man of substance, and he told others and impressed them. Most of us, I imagine, fell for the fifty per cent. dividends promised."

"There were no details of the process?"

"We didn't ask for them. You see, we relied on the reputation of the inventor, a scientist with a European reputation and a score of letters after his name. Professor Demetrius was the man. He said his formulæ

must be kept secret, for fear the bigwigs in the industry would steal his ideas."

"Any idea what they were?"

"Only vaguely. He said the fixation of nitrogen was an analogous process. His own had something to do with recovering from the atmospheric air certain chemicals which, unlike nitrogen, are not natural ingredients of it. An immense amount of fumes and smoke go up into the sky daily all over the country from various works and factories. That seemed sensible enough, and he put it graphically enough to convince us: said, for example, that smoke was gold going to waste and the sky over every industrial city a Tom Tiddler's ground for any scientist clever enough to exploit it. When we get scents and dyes from coal, as Cupolis pointed out, the idea did not seem fantastic."

"And this scientist, whose name is haunted with honorary letters, is genuine?"

"Absolutely. Surely he wouldn't back any financial flim-flam?"

"Unless he was squared, sir. Where does he come from?"

"A place in Czecho-Slovakia, called Oplasz," said Mand. "He didn't look to me like a cheat or swindler when he came to stay here once. He is a fussy, rather absent-minded, little man, and peppery too. He fizzed out at Cupolis once or twice."

"Oh, he may be all right. A trained chemist, is he?"

"And a physicist. He is in London at present."

Cobham noted the name. "I'll look him up later. If there is really something in the thing, the shareholders might like to reconstruct the company and get some money back."

Mand gave him the name of the hotel at which Demetrius stayed. "Of course, Cupolis may have merely made him a stalking-horse, superintendent."

"Possibly. Has, or had, Mr. Cupolis an office in town?"

"Yes, but it was a small one. He used to say too many companies wasted their money on luxurious offices and unnecessary staffs."

Cobham laughed. "He appears to have been the complete mug-catcher, sir.—What staff had he there?"

"I've only been once. I saw a girl typist and a fellow who was his business secretary."

"Did he look at all the sort of man to be in this ramp?"

"Not a bit. He seemed a dull, honest sort of man."

Cobham was filled with a new respect for Cupolis's talents. The fellow was like a poker player who bluffs a whole table with nothing but a small pair in his hand.

"I'll interview them when the inquest is over," said he. "Now I must have a talk with Smith, and then I'll see Professor Logard. After that I have to get back to Hindon for a conference with Captain Shardel."

Smith had been rather quicker over his lunch than his chief, and had already finished his examination of the servants when Cobham saw him.

"No luck, sir," he said. "Of course I may have made a mistake, but all of them seem devoted to Mr. Cupolis, and every one of them seems honest. I don't think for a moment that a servant entered this part of the house last night."

"What about their boots?"

"Not a small one among them, sir. The footmen are strapping fellows; the butler is heavy. I don't think we shall come on any clew in that quarter."

"I didn't think you would, Smith. Well, get on with the outside search now. The other fellows will be along soon. I shall go back to Hindon the moment I have seen Professor Logard."

"You are to see him, sir?"

"I am going up at once."

Chapter X

COBHAM IS SYMPATHETIC

AS he went upstairs to see Logard, Superintendent Cobham's face assumed its most kindly and sympathetic expression, and he took pains to walk and look rather less like an apotheosized policeman than usual.

He found the old professor sitting up in bed, propped by pillows, staring rather vacantly before him. The old man did not look wild now. He seemed helpless, timid; pathetically stricken by a blow he could hardly understand.

He fixed his eyes on Cobham with an appealing look and spoke in a thin, tired voice.

"It is good of you to come and see me, doctor. But I am really better. I have a headache that comes and goes, and I thought I was going to get a heavy cold, but the hoarseness is wearing off."

"I am glad to hear that," said Cobham, taking a chair to the bedside. "You're a bit worried over this financial trouble, I know. That will account for the headache."

"It is true, then? Is it true that Cupolis is dead too?"

"I am afraid so, but don't dwell on that. The great

thing is to get it out of your mind and try to pull yourself together."

The old man gave him a look which was almost cunning, though Cobham interpreted it rightly. "I know. I know. But, doctor, I am afraid of the police. It seems strange for me to say so.—I have never done any one any harm. I have lived very quietly."

"Absurd!" said Cobham briskly. "Who told you the police would worry you?"

"No one," said Logard in a low voice. "But I know it. I hear they are in the house. I know I was very angry last night, and I imagine I used language of a kind that is not usual with me. That comes back to me. And then I must say I was greatly annoyed with Cupolis. I felt that I could have done anything."

"The great thing is that you did not," said Cobham, and cleverly hit on a new line that would fit in with his presumed profession of doctor. "But I suppose, sir, you have heard of psycho-analysis? You are aware that worry like yours may be lessened, if not removed, by digging down to the roots of the worry. If you like to tell me what is at the back of your mind, the very confession of it may help."

"Of course I have heard of Freud, Jung, and their respective disciples," said the old man wearily, "but I am not a student of psychology. There may be something in what you say.—Let me think." He leaned his head back and, closing his eyes, began after a few moments to speak.

"I knew that I could have killed him. I wanted to last night. I thought I could, but perhaps at my age I could not. You see, doctor, there is a hiatus, a gap somewhere that I am unable adequately to bridge. It began last night when I went to bed. I have little recollection of what I did. But I know my pyjamas were soaked this morning, and now and again I have a feeling that I got up to do something."

"I see. Perhaps it was that you wanted more fresh air and leaned out of the window."

"Yes, it may be that. But the idea of air is associated somehow in my mind with an act or attempted act. I hope I make myself understood? While I do not know that there is any basis in fact for this idea, I do associate air, an act, and a rather trying belief that both were concerned with some violent impulse. The only violent impulse I can recollect in my life, the only sustained impulse of the kind, was behind my outbreak last night. It is a horrible thought that I wished ill to that man, but I did wish it. At the same time my normal self was trying to restrain this impulse; conscious but ashamed of it."

Cobham was listening intently. He saw he was on the right line.

"Inconsequent as it is, you have a feeling that your loss of control last night may have led you to attempt, or wish to attempt, to injure Mr. Cupolis last night?"

"That's it. I can't get it out of my mind. It's terrible. I felt that Mr. Mand suspected it. Your

colleague or partner, the other doctor, suspected it. I cannot believe it, but the idea is an incubus all the same."

This learned man's simplicity and guilelessness in matters outside the scope of his academical employment impressed itself forcibly on the superintendent. It was quite possible that he might have entered the next room and hurried back to his own on seeing the dead man. It was also possible that recollection of his violent feelings of the previous evening had led him to imagine that he had made an attack on Cupolis. In either case it was obvious that the old man was not a murderer, or of the type that produces murderers.

"Well," said Cobham, very cheerfully, "you can put that idea out of your mind at once."

"It is not so easy."

"Let me try again then.—If you were last night in the bedroom next door, though in a state for which your feelings rather than yourself were responsible, you would have some idea about the weapon you used, or thought of using."

"The weapon?"

"Of course. Now, last night you were angry. You wished to rush up and attack Cupolis, didn't you?"

"Yes, yes. I recollect that. It was an extraordinarily compelling influence."

"Very well. Cast your mind back. You did not expect at your age, sir, to do him much damage with your fists? From what I hear, Mr. Corbett thought of

that, as he is a boxer; Mr. Smith at once said he would like to horsewhip Cupolis; somebody else said he ought to be shot—though the latter is a figure of speech more than anything else. Have I made myself clear?"

"Oh, yes. I quite understand. Let me think. I know I did not conceive the idea of firearms. I have always had a horror of noise. I cannot be sure, but I think I felt I could take a heavy stick to him—a dreadful idea."

Cobham nodded. "Not a spear, of course."

"Oh, no."

"Or, say, a dagger?"

"I am quite sure I did not. In my youth I was a great lover of single-stick."

"That is it then, sir. You may be sure you are not suspected by any one. I can assure you that the police haven't given you a thought in this connection—the murder, I mean. As for the other doctor and Mr. Mand, it never crossed their minds."

The old man looked at him with painful eagerness. "You are sure of that—quite sure? I may have been mistaken. I hope you are right. If I could only get this idea off my mind I think I could feel better."

Cobham nodded vigorously. "I can assure you of it. And I can help to rid your mind of the idea for good and all by telling you we have found traces of an entry having been made from outside. Police are going to search the park and elsewhere. So, you see, there is nothing to worry about."

Logard's thin lips parted in a smile of weary relief. His eyes brightened a little and he put out a knotty hand and grasped Cobham's. "This is good news you have given me. Splendid news! I think I could sleep now.—Do you think it would do me good, doctor?"

"The best thing in the world, sir. Lie down and try to have a real rest."

Cobham was as good as a nurse in the way he arranged the old man's pillows and laid him back level on the bed. When he had seen that the professor was really comfortable, he patted his shoulder lightly and went out.

"I shouldn't be surprised if he was there last night," he said to himself, as he went down the stairs, "but as for killing Cupolis, no! We can abandon that theory altogether."

He did not go far down the stairs, however, but turned and visited Cupolis's room. There he climbed on to the ledge and examined the marks on the stone for some minutes, afterwards going into the other wing to bestow as much study on the marks on the ledge under Mand's window.

When he at last left the house a police car, which had brought the spare men, was standing at the door. He got in and was whirled off.

Chapter XI

FOLLOWING THE DRAG

CLIVE MERTON seemed to throw off his gloom as the day drew on, and did his best not only to comfort Mary Glenne, but to encourage the other members of the party to hope that the crash would not be as bad as was anticipated.

"I suppose we're all tied here until the inquest is over," he said at lunch, "but afterwards we shall be free, and some of us may be able to get details of these matters. After all, there is the factory half built, there is this process, for which Demetrius vouches. The fact that Cupolis threw away our money in luxurious living does not prove that a great deal of money is necessary to exploit the discovery."

"He said it was," grumbled Corbett.

"And we believed him at the time, I admit. But now we know he raised the money for himself, not the process."

Lord Cramish nodded. "There is some sense in that. If you care to join me later, Merton, I shall interview Demetrius and see if the process could not be developed economically. I have known of cases where a company was broken by reckless expenditure, but, having something of value to exploit, was afterwards put

on its feet at no great expense. I presume we should all like to get some of our money back."

"I don't care a hang how, as long as we do," cried Corbett.

"A good idea," said Andrews. "As a solicitor I might join you and take care of the legal side, eh?"

They talked more hopefully then, and after dinner Mary Glenne asked Clive if he would come out into the garden with her, as she had something to say to him.

Clive went willingly. He thought she had been very brave.

"You make me quite hopeful," she murmured, when they were walking along a path with bright herbaceous borders, "I mean about the company. I know so little of such things, but I see what you mean. Is Mr. Demetrius really such a clever scientist?"

"He has the highest degrees, Miss Glenne, I do know that."

"Then we may have something to go on," she said. "I hope so, if only for poor father's sake. Only, there's one thing—"

She broke off and he looked at her curiously.

"May I hear what it is?"

She nodded, hesitated, and spoke. "The money. You see, even if I do not know much about business, I feel that the company can't start again, unless there is some fresh money put into it."

He bit his lip. "I am afraid that is so."

"And we—well, we have very little more."

"Humph. But you realize that no attempt will be made to reconstruct the thing unless we are sure that it will pay. We shall be more careful next time."

"I see."

He walked warily. "And if it is sure to pay, then you will get the other money back, or most of it."

He was telling himself he would have to put down his schooner-yacht in any case. He would save on the professional skipper and crew. A ten-ton cutter would be just as good fun, and he could manage that all right.

Mary Glenne sighed. "I suppose so. But don't you see, we could not afford to put any in now."

"Of course not," he said, "but that is my point. I would willingly have offered what help I could before, but felt that it would have been—shall we say, tactless. This is another matter. If there is something after all in Demetrius's process, Lord Cramish and I will make very sure of our ground before we take an interest. If all goes well, however, I am sure your father would not object to my advancing you some capital for the reconstruction—since he would be aware that I would claim it again when the company was on its feet."

"I should have to ask him," she said gratefully. "Of course that is not the same thing. I do see that."

Clive Merton knew all he would like to do for her. It would be something if, on this excuse, he could help her to carry on for a while.

"I am glad you do."

There was a short silence, then Mary spoke softly. "Don't you think Mr. Cobham is a clever man? How quick he was in finding out about those footprints. Ever since lunch Mr. Smith and Mr. Corbett have been ever so much more cheerful."

"Corbett never seemed much put out," he replied. "Mr. Smith, of course, felt in a beastly hole, since he visited the library during the night. Colper is about the gloomiest fellow here."

Mary nodded: "I am sure it was some one from outside. There must be other people who disliked Cupolis. I don't suppose this was the first time he tried to swindle people."

"He certainly didn't lack practice," said Clive dryly.

"And yet there was that dagger," she said. "I can't explain it away."

"Who can?" said he hastily; "but let us talk of something else. We shall have had enough of the case before we're done.—Tell me about your home, about yourself, will you?"

There was a little pond in the park near the house, which had once been a monastery's fish-pond, supplying an abbey now quite demolished. As they came to the end of the gardens they saw men on the edge of the pond and Clive pointed.

"I wonder what they are up to?"

"Do you think we might look, or would they object?"

"I don't think so. We can try at least."

"What do you think they are doing?" she asked.

"I expect they are dragging. It's usually done in a search for a weapon. It's a natural instinct, I think, to throw things you don't want into a pond."

She felt excited. "Do hurry! I wonder will they find anything."

"Too much luck to hope for, Miss Glenne," he said. "Clews are not found so easily, I should imagine."

But he took her arm and hurried on all the same.

When they reached the margin of the pond, they found Sergeant Smith and two other men there. The detective did not object to their presence apparently, for he nodded and showed them a dragging tackle the men were improvising.

It consisted of loose strands of barbed wire, weighted in the center with lead, each end being attached to a rope.

"We may get an eel or two in the process," said the sergeant with a faint smile. "There are coarse fish here. I only hope there isn't too deep mud in the bottom, for that will make it twice as hard to find anything."

The two men were now ready, each taking an end of the rope, and moving a few yards apart, they dropped the leaded strands of barbed wire into the pond at its edge and began to move round the margin in different directions.

Presently they were moving inwards at the other side and beginning to take in the slack of the rope.

Finally, like fishermen hauling a shore seine, they met and tailed on to the rope and brought the drag slowly to the surface.

"Good!" said Smith, who had followed them round, attended by Clive Merton and Mary Glenne. "The soil is mostly on a gravel bed here, and that is a help."

There was a miscellaneous assembly of objects attached to the drag, or spiked on the barbs of the wire. Weeds, tin cans, a portion of an old coat, a bit of a broken night-line set long ago by some poacher, the skeleton of some animal untimely drowned, and a battered and sodden leather tobacco pouch.

Every one of these objects, however unimportant, was taken from the enveloping weed and laid out on the grass to be inspected later by Sergeant Smith.

After a glance at the collection he ordered a drag again from one side of the pond to the other, at right angles to the course of the last.

The weighted drag was thrown in, the men started off on their converging course, and again the drag was brought to bank. There were not so many weeds this time, nor was there such a catch of useless objects.

Another tin, a twig, a small eel—caught and spiked between two barbed strands—and then something that made even the grave sergeant give a little cry of delight.

He bent down and picked the object carefully up. It was a small, weighted grapnel, very nicely made, and not weighing more than three-quarters of a pound,

a thing which could be thrown up to hook on a cornice without difficulty. At the moment there was on it certain transparent slimy matter, but that also clung to the drag, and was plentiful among the weeds. "Frog or fish spawn," said the sergeant.

Mary had bent down in an effort to extricate the tiny eel. She got it clear hurriedly and threw it back into the water. Smith had already taken a large glass jar from a bag and placed the grapnel in it when she came to look.

"Oh, how clever of you!" she cried. "That does prove it. I am so glad."

The last vestiges of worry had disappeared miraculously from Merton's face.

"By Jove, yes!" he said. "Professor Logard will be relieved."

She lowered her voice. "I don't suppose he could have come out here?"

"He? Not likely. I say, sergeant, are you going to drag again?"

"Once more, sir," said Smith cheerfully. "This is a bit of all right, you see, and there may be more to come."

He corked up the jar with a very large cork, fastened it securely, and put it in the bag, which he closed.

But there was no more to come. They dragged again twice, and later dragged two more ponds in the park, without success.

Merton presently looked at his watch and declared

that it was time for tea. "I feel very bucked about this," he said, with a smile. "I bet the others will be delighted too. We'll go and tell them."

"I must say the country police are not such fools as people say," Mary remarked as they turned back to the house.

"But these are town police," he laughed. "Cobham has certainly managed very well, though. It was going to be a beastly business as it stood."

"They could not have suspected all of us."

"Why not? You see, they might find it difficult to prove that we were out of our bedrooms last night, but we have no alibis. We could only say we were where we were."

"But that would not hurt us."

"No, but as things stood, we all had a sort of motive for killing him."

"I don't see that. We are not a lot of criminals."

"Criminals of the professional sort don't commit many murders in this country," he said slowly. "Look up the trials if you like. I can't see a professional killing Cupolis when he knew that he had nothing to gain by it. But people who are ruined by a swindler may lose their heads and do something desperate. The professional is cool and calculating. He does not go in off the deep end for nothing."

"I see. I never thought of that."

It was a strange fact, and attested to Cupolis's fas-

cination, that the servants at Tendon Oaks took his death a good deal to heart. No doubt they understood little of his character, or what he had done, but he had been a kind master.

The butler, meeting Mary and Clive as they entered the house again, looked quite gloomy.

"Tea is about to be served, sir," he said to Clive. "I was asked, sir, to have it put in the morning room."

Clive nodded. "Thank you. By the way, the police have found the grapnel they were looking for."

"Have they, sir? That's good!" replied the butler, who did not know that they had been looking for anything in particular. "The other gentlemen are waiting, sir."

The entrance of Mary and Clive interrupted what appeared to be a rather gloomy conference. Major Brown was tugging ruefully at his mustache, Colper sat icily silent, Smith looked miserable, Andrews and Corbett resentful. Lord Cramish alone appeared to be composed and equable.

"Good news!" said Clive, as he went in behind Mary. "Sergeant Smith has found a grapnel in the pond!"

Half of them started up and all began to ask questions and express their delight in various ways. While they were talking, Mand came in, followed by the butler, the tea, and a footman, who was carrying a table.

"Have you heard the latest?" asked Smith of Mand, and proceeded at once to relate it. "Jove! that proves it, doesn't it?"

Mand stared. "In that near pond, you mean? Are you sure?"

"Miss Glenne and I saw it brought up," said Clive. "It was a grapnel all right, and obviously made for a particular purpose. What use has any one else for a grapnel of three tines, made of steel, weighing not more than three-quarters of a pound, and with a ring on the end? It was just the sort of thing I could imagine a cat-burglar using, with a fine rope at the end of it."

Vance Mand looked at him thoughtfully. "That sounds reasonable, I must say. But why throw it into a pond so near the house?"

"You're too dry, old fellow!" cried Corbett. "The thing was there and they saw it. It shows absolutely that an outsider used it, climbed up to the ledge and did in old Cupolis."

"I hope and trust you are right," said Mand, still doubtfully. "If it is so, it lets every one of you out."

"We were never in!" cried Smith spitefully.

"Of course not actually, my dear fellow, but I was speaking of police suspicions. I am quite convinced now that Cobham is going the right way about this investigation. Though, mind you, even if it is proved an outsider, it may be difficult to catch him."

"Bother that!" said Corbett. "The find has given me an appetite for tea anyway."

Mand smiled at his eagerness. "Will you do the honors for me, Miss Glenne? I'll just run up and tell Professor Logard. He will like to know."

Chapter XII

COBHAM IS INTERESTED IN NATURAL HISTORY

IT was about seven o'clock when Sergeant Smith drove into Hindon and pulled up at the police station.

Superintendent Cobham was there, talking to two plain-clothes officers in his private office. Captain Shardel had just gone. The superintendent, seeing Smith's rare smile, dismissed his two subordinates, closed the door, and motioned Smith to a seat.

"I can see it's your lucky day, Smith," he remarked as he sat down.

"It is, sir, indeed," said the gratified sergeant, putting the bag on the table and beginning to open it. "We dragged the ponds in the park, sir, but the first we came to gave us this!"

Dramatically for him, he withdrew the large jar and held it up. Cobham stared for a moment, then reached over and took it in his hand.

"Hallo! You have made a find! In the nearer pond, eh? You've done well! Even better than I thought you would."

He took a tool from a drawer, lifted the cork, and with a button-hook on a compendious knife he carried fished up the slight steel grapnel.

"Been trying to preserve it in jelly, Smith?" he asked jovially.

"There's a lot of spawn in that pond, sir. The weeds and cans and everything we brought up were covered with it.—Frogs, I think."

Still holding the object pendent, Superintendent Cobham observed it closely and asked the sergeant to bring him a large reading glass. He then surveyed it somewhat magnified.

"I am no White of Selborne," he laughed, "but I don't think this is frog spawn. What it is I don't know, but I am interested in it, and would like to get an expert opinion."

"Why, sir, it can't have anything to do with the criminal?"

"No. I don't think he had anything to do with this. At all events we have found the thing we were looking for. Any traces of feet near the pond?"

"No, sir, but the grass is thick, and then the terrible rain that night—last night, made everything soaking."

Cobham opened his drawer again. "You are not a bad hand at a sketch, Smith. Just make a rough drawing of the shape of this, and I'll give you the measurements."

He took a pair of callipers from the drawer and, still holding up the grapnel, measured the distance from tine to tine, the width of the grip, the length of the shaft, and the size of the ring welded on the shaft.

He gave these in inches to his colleague, who soon produced a scale drawing of the object.

"There is no sign of the rope or cord," said the superintendent, when he had put the callipers away again and lowered the grapnel gently back into the jar. "You didn't find that, I suppose?"

"No, sir. That was all we found."

Cobham leaned back in his chair and reflected for a moment, then he began to speak slowly. "Of course there will be a search round here for tramps and suspicious people, who may have been seen near the house. To-morrow morning we have the inquest. If nothing unforeseen happens, the guests may then go home. I have verified the names and addresses given to me by the secretary, Mr. Mand.—By the way, this house was taken furnished, and the last quarter's rent paid in advance."

"I see, sir."

"Well, when the inquiry is over, I may have to ask you to take over here for me temporarily. Inspector Halte will be on another part of the case. I thought that only fair to you when you have done so well."

"Thank you, sir," said Smith, beaming. "Going away, sir?"

"To London. I must see this Professor Demetrius, also the secretary in charge of Cupolis's office. Then I want to look in at the Natural History Museum, if I have time."

"I see, sir," replied Smith, though he was far from seeing what the Natural History Museum had to do with the case.

"Right! Now here are the photographs taken when we first came. They're pretty good, I think, and show the position of the dead man relative to the furniture in the room quite clearly. Have a look at them and see if they are any help.—I am going home now for a bite."

Smith took the photographs handed to him and picked up the reading glass. Cobham nodded good-humoredly and went out, the big glass jar carefully carried between his hands.

But he did not go straight home for supper. He turned into the reference room of the public library and sat there for some time examining various works of reference and making notes from them.

While he and Smith were talking at Hindon, Lord Cramish at Tendon Oaks was finishing a very prolonged conversation over the telephone.

He was speaking to the man he had rung up on the previous night, when they had first heard the bad news. The other man had been collecting details of the crash all day and poured them forth with a sort of disinterested gusto.

"Yes, it looks bad for you," he said; "I don't think there will be a bob in the pound. No one seems to know what he did with it. The reporters have been

besieging the office, and the chap there is as dumb as a fish. I don't think he wants to be. I have an idea he simply knows nothing."

"Then why the devil was he there?"

"To provide a name and a habitation, my dear chap. Cupolis seems to have been a dashed deep one."

"He was. But look here, we have this process, haven't we? We have a factory half built, and we can get on to that foreign chemist. My idea is to see if we can't reconstruct or something."

"All right. But can you get on to that chemist? I heard a rumor. It may be tosh, of course, but it was that Cupolis had a rare turn-up with Demetrius. When Greek meets Czecho, don't you know, there's bound to be a few dissonances in the air. They say old Dem told Cupolis what he thought of him in every vernacular from low Dutch to even lower German."

"I don't believe it. When was this?"

"About a week ago. I don't say it is true. But I heard it. Shall I try to find out if that 'half-factory' of yours was built on a mortgage?—The sort of trick Cupolis might have played you?"

Lord Cramish, preparing to hang up the receiver, grunted savagely. "Do! And you might see Tomkins and say what was in our minds. If the process is worth anything, we make a bit out of the wreck."

"Instead of getting it all in the neck? Right! I'll see him. He's the man for binding up the wounds of broken companies, if any one is."

"Thanks."

"By the way, have you found the good fellow who took off your late lamented swindler?"

"No, but I think he came from outside."

"Because," said his friend, "this is still *sub judice*, and one of our more sensational rags is steering very near the wind. It's making a feature of the fact that your crowd of johnnies had a very good reason to wish Cupolis in a fairer world!"

"So we had!" said Cramish bluntly. "But it's not for them to say so.—Thanks again. I must ring off."

Chapter XIII

GOOD MEN AND TRUE

THE day of the inquest found Tendon Oaks a place of noise and movement such as it had not been for many years. It is true that, the inquiry being held within the bounds of the mansion, it was possible to exclude the over-curious crowd and to admit only such reporters as could be accommodated in the building where the coroner sat.

But Superintendent Cobham was there, with his assistant, Sergeant Smith, Captain Shardel, and three policemen. The police surgeon came with the coroner, and a selection of the public, to preserve the legend of the openness of inquests, was allowed to fill the vacant spaces of the improvised court.

With the witnesses, who were the nine guests, and sundry servants, there was hardly room for a thin man when the jury was sworn and the inquiry began.

Even in a murder case which excites wide interest, there are few more dreary spectacles than an inquest. The absence of wigs and robes and the majesty of the bench, with the dullness furnished by civilian dress, the makeshift nature of the surroundings, and the feeling that the verdict is only the first stage in a long process

to be continued elsewhere; these things dull the edge of interest, and only later take on a fictitious brightness in the hands of the pictorial reporter.

The inquest on the body of Mr. Cupolis was as dull as any. The police seemed willfully to treat the case in the most prosaic spirit. They brought forward no very sensational details, and seemed content to proceed without attempting to denounce anybody.

The questions that were asked the various witnesses were without sting, so that those who expected to see a minion of the law suddenly rise, point a finger at one of the nine guests, and cry: "Thou art the man!" were woefully disappointed.

The coroner, a dry and stolid man in private life, was desiccated to a degree here. He put questions in a monotonous and unconvincing voice. He did not rebuke curious jurors or sit on somebody over a point of etiquette.

It was only later in the case that the public understood the meaning of this neutrality. They had heard Smith tell how he had gone down to the library for a book, and it was generally thought that here was the inflamed shareholder who had done the deed. They had then heard how the professor had been very excited on the evening before the murder, and hysterical before Cupolis's very door on the morning after. They had all promptly acquitted Smith and decided that the poor old man was more technically than morally guilty of doing what he did. And then they had heard Ser-

geant Smith speak of the footprints outside the windows and the marks on the ledges, and they had become thoroughly confused in their minds and wondered how they could have suspected any of the nine guests.

When the genial superintendent stood up, all eyes were fixed on his face. The smile was well suppressed now. He spoke quite clearly, but not over-loud, and he gave the details of his investigation with about as much dramatic point as an accountant's clerk calling over figures with a companion.

Excitement rose as he gave his views, and presently told them how he had instructed Sergeant Smith to make a careful search of the park. There was a subdued gasp when a large jar was handed up containing a grapnel that had been found in a pond just beyond the verge of the gardens.

The jar disappeared again into the superintendent's capacious bag, the superintendent answered a few questions briefly and stood down, his place being taken by the grave sergeant.

He spoke of his searches in the park and the dragging of the pond, with the appearance on the drag of the grapnel already produced in court. He told a juror that tin cans and other irrelevant objects made up the rest of the bag. He told the coroner that the width of the grapnel and the distance between the tines of it suggested that it had been the instrument with which the marks on the ledges had been made. He agreed that such things were used by the criminal

classes, or a section of them, to gain access to upstair windows. Then he too stood down.

Selecting as dusty words as he could find, the coroner began drably to give his opinions to the jury. Himself a medical man, he lingered over the technical details of the wound, and gave an unnecessary definition and description of the phrase *rigor mortis*, with its bearing upon the hour of death. He told them something of narcotics as a cure and as a habit. Then he assured them that at the present they were considering a case in its first stages. It was left to them to give a verdict in consonance with their conscientious scrutiny of the facts before them, but, in case their consciences were not quite up to this, he assured them that everything pointed to an outside agency being behind the deed. After informing them that this was not a court of morals, he proceeded to touch on the immorality of predatory finance, and to express sympathy with the victims of the recent crash. Thereupon he generously white-washed Mr. Smith, Professor Logard, the seven remaining guests, not to speak of Mr. Mand and the servants; complimented the superintendent on his management of the case, and wound up by telling the jury they might retire to consider his verdict. He said "Your verdict," but they had no doubt what he meant, so all was for the best.

The jury retired. The nine guests, relief painted on all their faces, sat waiting for a quarter of an hour, and then the good men and true came back.

Superintendent Cobham paid no attention to them. It was evident that he was already making ready to get off to London.

It had been arranged that Vance Mand should stand off the reporters after the inquest, while the guests got to the sanctuary of the mansion. He had willingly volunteered to do this, and when the jury had duly returned their verdict of "Murder against some person or persons unknown," and the coroner had approved of and recorded it, Mand got up and stationed himself near the press table.

The others made a bolt for it, Lord Cramish with Mary Glenne on his arm leading the van. A few cameras clicked as they shut the door behind them and sank into seats disposed about the great hall.

"Sporting of Mand to tackle that crowd," said Corbett, at once lighting a fat cigar. "Glad that's over. By the way," he lowered his voice and spoke to Smith who sat next him, "I don't mind telling you, old chap, that I had some nice news this morning—a double, a splendid win over Sternsheet and Cleg's Boy."

Smith looked at him enviously. Lord Cramish and Miss Glenne and Major Brown sat together talking. Then Colper came across, and Mary, who had taken a dislike to that elegant individual, slipped away, and was joined by Clive Merton. The professor, looking thin and white, but much better, was listening to Andrews.

"Just what I expected," said Clive, drawing up a chair for her, "but now we scatter, I suppose. Have you any plans?"

"I must get back to father. I am afraid he will be awfully worried about me."

"He will have heard of this, of course?"

"He has the *Times* and *Post* sent him every day. He is sure to know. Besides, I wired to him yesterday afternoon, telling him I was all right."

Clive reflected. "I wonder have we any friends in common?"

She stared up at him. "Why?"

"Oh, I just wonder—your father was never a yachting man, was he?"

She shook her head. "No, he had a passion for shooting. But Mr. Heal, a friend of his in the old days, had a racing yacht."

"The *Phaleron?*" said Clive eagerly. "A six-meter class boat. Of course, I know Heal. An oldish man with gingery hair—or what remains of it."

She nodded. "That is he. But I haven't seen him for some years."

Merton seemed to find something satisfactory in her reply.

"Good. That is all I want. You see, I don't think you would know how to put this new scheme to your father. I have had another chat with Cramish about it this morning and we are going ahead."

"Yes?"

"Well—er—this crash must have startled your father. He will be worrying, as you say. I thought if I could have a word with him, I might put it more clearly."

"But we live away down in Somerset."

"That's nothing! I came all this way from town, only to be told that a lot of my money was gone."

"But I couldn't let you—"

"Wait a moment. I haven't done yet. How are you both going to carry on if this money is lost irretrievably? You can't! You will tell your father about the proposed reconstruction. No doubt. Only, will you convince him? Will you be able to put the case so that he is willing to come in? I doubt it. This sort of job is difficult enough for me, but you know nothing of business at all. As I see it, you owe it to your father to let me talk to him and explain."

She bit her lip. "You think you ought to?"

"Absolutely. And we have Heal for a bridge between us. What I propose to do is to see you home and put the case direct."

"When?"

"You don't think of staying another night, do you? Mand said the police did not mind our going when the inquest was over."

"Is there a train?"

"I'll get a Bradshaw and look. If we can get away some time after lunch, we could do it."

When he went off for the railway guide, Cramish came across with Colper.

"We are going to try to set the concern on its legs," he said, taking his card from his pocket. "Will you keep that card? I am letting all the others know my address, and I want your address. You see, I hope to communicate with all of you if I can see my way clear to reconstruct."

He took a notebook and a gold-topped pencil from his pocket, and Mary added her name and address to those already there.

Colper spoke suddenly: "I am going back to town by the 2:15."

"I think Andrews, Corbett, Smith and I are also going by it," said Lord Cramish. "We are going to see Professor Logard off at Salisbury. He tells us he has a niece, and we have already wired her—last night, you know—to meet the old man there."

"Then I ought to have my things packed," said Colper, and turned away.

Lord Cramish looked after him with a curious expression, then smiled at Mary.

"This has been a wretched time for you, Miss Glenne. But what do you propose to do?"

She told him, and at that moment Clive Merton came back.

"We can get a train at three. It means changing, but it will set us out at five past nine."

"You go the same way?" said Lord Cramish.

"I want to see Miss Glenne's father, who is a friend of a yachting friend of mine," said Clive. "Will that do?"

"Splendidly," said Mary shyly, not unaware of the indulgent smile that crept to Cramish's tight mouth.

"What is Mand going to do?" asked the latter after a pause.

"He is staying here to wind up things. He has to."

Cramish nodded. "I meant the next few days, of course. As a matter of fact, he doesn't do so badly, for he hasn't lost much—"

"A good deal to him."

"Possibly. But you see what I mean. A friend of mine will, I think, take him on.—He's making money hand over fist, has a socially ambitious wife, and would find Mand no end of a help."

"I wish all the rest of us had as good a prospect," murmured Clive, and then remembered that Mary was listening. "Of course, though, I forgot our new scheme."

"Oh, that, of course," said Cramish.

But he had really more hopes for it than Clive Merton dared sincerely to entertain.

Chapter XIV

SCIENCE DOES NOT ALWAYS KEEP ITS HEAD

THE superintendent's jovial temperament did not seem to have been at all damped by the verdict on Mr. Cupolis. On the contrary, he settled himself in a third class smoker in a train from Tendon Mocket, with a smile on his face, and the big bag carefully laid on the seat beside him.

While the guests were having lunch at Tendon Oaks, Cobham was watching the scenery whirl by the window and humming the air of an ancient comic song, "If I could only get behind him."

It was not a very fast train, but eventually he reached London, and set out, bag in hand, for the Natural History Museum.

He arrived there shortly after, having picked up a taxi outside the station, and asked to see the head of the ichthyological department. The official to whom he spoke interpreted his wishes rightly enough, but assured him that the great man was engaged. He suggested that the superintendent should put his suggestions, or questions, on paper, and produced a pen and a tablet for that purpose.

Cobham sat down, wrote a note, produced the jar from his bag, and smiled as he licked the flap of the envelope handed to him.

"Be good enough to give him this jar and this note," he said. "He will understand what I require. I have stated that pretty fully. I have also put my address inside so that he can communicate with me."

"Will you call back for this jar, sir?"

"No. He will send the contents to me by registered post. I have mentioned that."

Having shown his interest in one kind of science, Cobham promptly directed his attention to another. He had a cup of tea in the refreshment room of the museum, and then went by taxi to the hotel where Demetrius, of the many degrees, was wont to stay.

The hotel was neither large nor garish, and not even remotely fashionable. Professor Demetrius was not there at the moment. He had returned that morning from the country, but he had left once more to spend the night with a friend in Surrey.

"So he has been in the country, has he?" said Cobham to the hall-porter. "What part, do you know?"

"I don't know, sir. He just took a handbag and went off for four days. He doesn't talk much to us, sir, being a foreigner and odd like."

"Because it is natural to him, or because he is a foreigner?" Cobham asked with a smile.

The porter scratched his head. "He's none too good-tempered any time, sir; flies off the handle a bit, if you don't mind me saying so.—Who shall I say called, sir?"

"No one," said Cobham after a pause; "I mean you need not mention it."

A shilling sealed the bargain. Cobham took a second taxi and was hurried off to the city.

He was humming as he drove, and it was "Ye banks and braes o' bonnie Doon" that made music in that unromantic cab.

"Went off to the country for four days and didn't say where," he was thinking. "Had a habit of flying off the handle, as my friend put it just now. That's the second professor in a few days who is apt to lose his head."

The taxi stopped presently outside a rather dingy office block. Cobham got out and went upstairs to an office on the fourth floor.

Mr. Cupolis's offices consisted of three rooms. One was marked "private" and belonged to the deceased financier, the next, or inner one, was used by his manager, Mr. Brown, the outer one usually housed a typist, but was now also occupied by a number of excited and angry people, in addition to the girl who was trying to pacify the throng.

Cobham took pity on her as he entered and saw the trouble. He had no *locus standi* in London, but he had business to do.

"Now then, gentlemen," he said, "I belong to the police force and I have an investigation to make here. I shall be glad if you can postpone whatever business you may have until to-morrow."

The throng broke up. In a sense they were half pacified by the thought that the law was on the track of Cupolis's minions, if it had necessarily and unavoidably let slip the man himself.

"I had no business to do that," said Cobham with a smile to the distracted girl, "but I could see those poor creatures were anxious to eat you. I'm from Hindon, and a policeman right enough, though not a London one."

The girl looked at him gratefully. "They were awful, though, of course, I understand how they feel. But I don't think I can tell you anything. I have been worried to death, and I do wish I had never come to this beastly hole."

"Never mind," said Cobham. "My business is not with you. If I were you I should lock the outer door and then tell Mr. Brown that Superintendent Cobham of the Hindon police wishes to speak with him."

"You were in charge of the murder case down there?" she said interestedly as she turned the key in the door.

"I am still. Now run along like a good girl and tell Mr. Brown the siege is raised and I want to have a talk with him."

She knocked on the door leading to the next room. They heard a key turned and then a head looked out cautiously.

If Mr. Cupolis's idea in engaging Brown had been to impress the public with the honesty of the concern

—as indeed it was—he could not have chosen better. Mr. Brown looked so honest as to be almost stupid. Conscientiousness was written over most of his face and scruples scribbled over all the rest. And now he gave the impression of having been weeping over the state of the company's affairs.

The girl indicated Cobham and said something in a low voice. Brown, no longer fearing that this strapping individual was a minatory shareholder, forced a smile and invited the superintendent into the inner office.

Once inside, a glance told Cobham that Cupolis had carried into practice his high-sounding sentiments about economy. The room was sparsely furnished, its chief ornament being a large set of plans and elevations of the factory which was to be, but had not yet advanced far towards being. The chairs and table and cupboards were plain and of Austrian oak.

The secretary of the company nervously invited Mr. Cobham to sit and even more timidly offered him one of the last cigars Cupolis had kept for the use of influential clients. This was not an economical cigar, but Cobham took one. The secretary absent-mindedly lighted another.

"Now, superintendent," he said, speaking rather diffidently, "what can I do for you? This has been a terrible business. I have simply been invaded by hordes since Mr. Cupolis died."

"Was murdered," said Cobham shortly. "Well, I understand that, and I quite see what has happened.

We will take that for read and get on. Mr. Cupolis had two secretaries apparently, one for the social side and one for the company side. I have seen Mr. Mand. He knows nothing of Mr. Cupolis's business. Do you think I am right in saying that?"

Brown nodded vigorously and yet perplexedly. "How could he? I am supposed to be the secretary of the companies, but I am ashamed to say—no, that is an exaggeration. It is not my fault. I did what I was told."

"I am sure you did," said Cobham, aware at once that this man had been chosen because he would do what he was told and betray neither curiosity nor imagination in the doing of it. "I got the idea from Mand that Cupolis kept his secrets to himself and only used his staff for routine work and correspondence."

"That is right. You can see every letter and document we have filed here since we started, but I don't think any of them would give you a valuable hint in any direction."

Cobham smiled. "I shall have to look through them when we have had our chat, and I should also like to see Mr. Cupolis's pass-books. I spent a part of yesterday going through the stuff Mr. Mand put at my disposal."

"He left no pass-book here, sir. When he drew money or deposited it, he must have done so himself."

Cobham puffed at that fine cigar for a few moments in silence, then: "As the position of the shareholders,

owing to Mr. Cupolis's action, has a bearing on the case, as providing a possible motive," he said, "I shall be glad to hear if you have any idea what assets will be realizable?"

Poor Brown made a sound like a faint groan. "My dear sir, that is the question people are firing at me all day. I have no idea."

"Oh, come! You must have some."

"Well, superintendent, I think you may have heard he took three houses furnished and paid for them all in advance."

"Thoughtful of him, but they do not represent assets," said Cobham.

"Or liabilities," said Brown hopefully. "Then there is this factory. As a rule, builders are paid from time to time on an architect's certificate, and I think only about five thousand remains to be paid. Naturally, I wired them to stop work when I heard what had happened."

"But they will have a contract. They might sue for breach. Is the ground leased?"

"No, I think I heard Mr. Cupolis say he bought it freehold.—Yes, of course he did."

"Meanwhile, how much has gone into the factory?"

"Perhaps twenty thousand. I did attend to those payments. He gave seven thousand five hundred for the ground."

"Have you any idea roundly what he got from the various people who invested?"

"I don't know exactly. From what I have been told and from the letters I have got from shareholders, he must have raised over two hundred thousand pounds."

"So that there is a nice little sum unaccounted for."

"There is."

Now the superintendent did stare at Brown. "You mean that seriously. Do you mean to say you have nothing to show, no scrip or stock or shares bought by Cupolis—no property whatever?"

"I am afraid not. The petty cash in the office amounts to nine pounds four and three. There is the furniture and a typewriter. I do not know what Mr. Mand is going to do, but I know my salary is due two weeks, and I must look for another job."

"Mr. Mand is getting a job with a friend of one of the investors," said Cobham. "So you are in a hole too? But I suppose you can give me the name of Cupolis's bank?"

Mr. Brown gave it, and added: "I don't know what balance he has there, if any."

"Or how many more accounts," said Cobham dryly. "Now, look here. You have heard of Professor Demetrius, no doubt. Has he ever been in here?"

"He was here two weeks ago with Mr. Cupolis."

"Were they on good terms?"

Brown shook his head. "That foreigner carried on amazingly. I can't hear what is said next door, but I heard voices, and one was simply yelling and dancing

about like a cat on hot bricks. The foreign man I mean."

"Do you know what it was all about?"

"No, I don't. But Mr. Demetrius came out by the door into this office; he was so excited he didn't know what he was doing. His hair was ruffled up all over his head and he glared at me as if I was an enemy and used language."

"Foreign?"

"I should say several foreign languages. I heard something like 'verfluchtes bengel!' and then 'Pfui!' and 'sacré nom' of something."

"Was Cupolis angry too?"

"No, he never was angry. He came behind and asked me to let Professor Demetrius out. He said after that the man was worried because the factory was so slow in building."

Superintendent Cobham got up. "Thank you. Now I will have a run through all your papers and see what I can see. It is too late to touch the bank now. I'll go round in the morning.—If it is any consolation to you, Mr. Brown, I may tell you that Lord Cramish and some of the other investors think of reconstruction. I expect they will ask you to carry on for the moment."

A thorough and lengthy examination of all the papers convinced Cobham that the late Mr. Cupolis had determined that none of the investors should know what either his right hand or his left hand was doing. Either he had spent most of the money he had obtained

by his specious misrepresentations, or else he had cached it somewhere and had intended to make a bolt with it.

There was no document in the office to show that he possessed a hundred pounds' worth of property or even a bank balance. And there had been none in the papers examined at Tendon Oaks.

"He seems to have made a clean sweep," said Cobham before he left. "This means ruin to a good many."

Mr. Brown leaned his head on his hands. This was what he had been hearing for the last two days and he took it rather to heart.

Cobham went away to the West End and had dinner in a restaurant. Then he went to Bloomsbury and took a room in a quiet hotel. Then he visited a cinema and sat for two hours watching with gentle amusement the efforts of police armed with revolvers, tear-bombs and armed cars to round up some crooks.

"They do see life over there anyway," he mused. "Fancy me capering down Hindon High Street in an armored car. Well, well!"

He slept well that night, and after a comfortable breakfast went off to the bank where Cupolis kept his account, or, it might be, his overdraft.

His researches there were just as depressing, though perhaps more fruitful, than those at the office. Cupolis's balance stood at eight pounds three shillings.

But here was evidence of some dealings in stocks of various kinds, and for large amounts. The bank had

bought for Mr. Cupolis at various times, the total amount being in the region of one hundred and twenty thousand pounds. Superintendent Cobham noted down particulars, had a little further conversation with the manager, and left.

Inspector Halte of the Hindon force had already arrived in town, and met the superintendent by appointment at the hotel. Cobham handed over to him the notes he had made, gave him particulars of the stocks and shares Cupolis had bought, and smiled pleasantly.

"Now you can get busy with these. Regard each of those investments as a criminal and don't come back till you have traced it to its present hiding-place. Ring me up every day and let me hear how you get on."

"Very well, sir. Are you leaving town to-day?"

"I hope to, if I am successful in an interview this morning. If not, I shall ring you up from here."

Inspector Halte nodded, saluted and went off.

Cobham began to hum "Where did you get that girl; oh, you lucky devil!" It had a lively melody and was one of his favorite aids to meditation.

Chapter XV

BUT SUPERINTENDENT COBHAM DOES

SUPERINTENDENT COBHAM, who had a quaint way of putting things, said that Professor Demetrius looked like a Czech. By that he meant that he was not like a Frenchman or a German, but like the sound of his nationality; which Cobham could not pronounce.

He was a little man, with long hair of a bristly kind, high cheek-bones, an ugly mouth, a forked and dissolute-looking beard, and small, deep-set eyes. He dressed like a dustman, and had his pockets apparently full of notes on scraps of paper, test-tubes, pieces of minerals and other oddments. When he was not excited, which was rarely, he had a habit of taking a note from his pocket and reading it while he talked, or of focusing his small eyes on one of the mineral samples.

When Cobham at last managed to find him in the hotel, to which he had just returned, he mentioned his business and immediately became the recipient of a hot blast of words.

"He was a dummkopf!" cried Demetrius, when he saw that his words flew over Cobham's head; "a schweinhund! Also he was a coquin!"

"Quite," said Cobham, "but—"

"Ach!" shouted Demetrius, "what for a man that! You are English. You understand no language therefore. I say to you he was peeg! He was dirt-dog! He was skoonk!"

"You don't appear to have liked him, professor," said Cobham.

The little man flew into another passion and several tongues. He even danced a little till a test-tube fell out of his pocket and broke, and he had to collect the fragments.

"I quite agree with you," said Cobham, when he found an opening, "but I did not come about that. Mr. Cupolis is dead, as you know. I have to make an investigation. I want to know first where you were staying lately."

Demetrius shut his mouth tightly. "What has that to do with you?"

"A great deal. May I suggest that you were in Scotland for a day or two?"

"Ach, lieber himmel! I am not Cupolis. I not run away and schwindle, eh? I am man of science, hein. What is it you want, eh?"

"To know if you were in Scotland lately."

"No, I have not been in Schottland. What do I do in there? Do you think I am mad, eh?"

Cobham privately thought he was a border-line case, but he shook his head.

"Come, sir. Who says that?"

"You English!" shouted Demetrius. "As the mad do, you say all others are mad. Is there not my process? I make from the air, is it not? What is there in the air? Himmel! What is there not in the air? Chemicals. Already you have nitrates. Nicht wahr? You see that over here, and you say it is so because you see it. But you do not see my chemical from the air, so you say it is not."

Cobham grinned. "It seems to me Mr. Cupolis spent most of his time saying it was there and getting money on the strength of it, sir."

Again Cupolis was complimented in various languages, and the professor ended breathlessly: "Ah, money for him, yes, but he does not me at all formerly or now pay. Ach, the escroc, the apache, the altogether-to-be-damned fellow!"

And now he got into such a passion, and there was such a shower from his pockets, accompanied by a torrent of reproaches from his lips, that Cobham rose to go.

"Please let me know your movements during the past week, by letter to the Superintendent of Police, Hindon," he said. "I give you two days. If you refuse to account for yourself after that, I must take legal steps to procure your evidence."

Demetrius panted. He was too hoarse to speak. But he dramatically indicated the door with a hand which already held some papers, a broken test-tube, a sample of molybdenite, and a phial of acid.

Cobham bowed and went out.

Cobham was one of those intelligent people who never give a thought to matters outside their scope, but at once apply for information to those who do. He returned to his hotel, rang up Scotland Yard, mentioned his business in town, and asked to be supplied with an introduction to a chemical expert.

"If you have one you employ, and could telephone to him that I am coming, I should be much obliged," he added.

After a minute's wait, he was supplied with the name and address of the eminent man he wanted and informed that a message would be telephoned to announce his advent.

Cobham rang off and promptly drove away to the expert's house, where he found him busy in his laboratory among his worshiping assistants. The great man nodded, told him to wait for five minutes, and then joined him and showed him into a little room beyond.

He was a stolid-looking man, with a calm face and even calmer eyes, and he dressed very well, though most of him was shrouded at the moment in a white garment.

"Well, superintendent," he said, glancing at Cobham's card as he sat down, "what can I do for you? Whatever it is, if five minutes will serve, let me hear it."

Cobham thanked him. "Simply this, sir. Do you know a foreigner called Professor Demetrius?"

The man of science blinked once. "Yes, I do."

"Is he really a man whose degrees and pretensions, sir, will bear examination?"

The great man seemed amused by something. "Certainly. He has a great many degrees, and from many quarters; some honorary, of course. He was once looked upon as the coming light in Europe. I had a great admiration for him myself."

"Oh. But you speak in the past tense, sir."

"Do I? Well, yes. Have you seen him?"

"This morning, sir."

"What did you think of him?"

"He seemed excitable to say the least of it."

"The very least of it," remarked the other, with a chuckle. "The man is as mad as a hatter. His brain has gone! Do you know that the man Cupolis, whose case you are investigating, was trying to push a process invented by Demetrius to get chemicals from the air?"

"I do," said Cobham, who knew that scientists often call other scientists mad if they disagreed with their views. "But is there not something in it?"

"In the air, my dear fellow, completely in the air. We know of one process, but that is nothing. The fact that we can take fish from the sea does not prove that we can catch them flying over the trees on land."

"Do you merely base your doubts about his sanity on a scientific disagreement?" asked Cobham.

The other leaned back and laughed. "No. I was

present some months back at a meeting of a few colleagues, to entertain Professor Demetrius. What do you think he did?"

"I have no idea, sir."

"Ha! He brought some sea-water with him, put it over a burner to evaporate the water—I am putting this crudely to you—and then called on us all to acclaim his discovery that he had found a means of producing synthetic salt!"

"It may have been a joke, sir."

"Joke? He was going to strangle Heather, who laughed and asked him to show us the little vanishing trick with a rice pudding. No, my dear man, I saw Professor Ghaff the other day, one of his closest friends, and he told me in confidence that the poor chap had been off his head ever since the war."

Cobham thought of Cramish and Merton, who wanted to start the concern again; of Mary Glenne and her father and the others. He looked gloomily at the chuckling scientist.

"Then it's a bit of a blue egg, sir, for the people who put their money into Cupolis's concern? There is no hope of making a new start with it?"

"My dear fellow, I have seen drawings of the plant he wanted to set up. He showed it to me himself. I can assure you that no engineer could understand what it was made to do, or see any meaning in it. If the air was more full of chemicals than it is, that plant

would not have recovered one. To me, it looked like the bad dream of a chemist gone mad, who had been studying Heath Robinson's drawings."

"As bad as that?" said Cobham heavily.

"Or worse," said the other. "Is that all you want to know? Right. I have something rather important on hand and must get on with it."

When Cobham was out in the street again, he stood for a few moments thinking, then drove back to his hotel, had a meal, and set out on his return to Hindon.

He did not think it necessary to worry about the work he had given the inspector, new as the latter was to London. It might be a very long and arduous, almost impossible task, that of tracing the money invested with Cupolis to its present hiding-place. It might even be that the investors had no claim on it now. Cupolis might have spent it or gamed it away on the tables at Monte Carlo. In any case, he had trained all his officers to follow his own example.

"Never say you can't do this or understand that," he had told them when first promoted to Hindon. "A police officer, however high, is not supposed to be a master of all trades or a dabbler in the arts and professions. But, high or low, he has this advantage: he has an organization behind him, he has money, not only for any necessary expenses, but also to buy opinions from those who are best qualified to give them. Say I am asked to find out what a criminal could do with a certain poison. I don't get a book; I get an

expert. What takes me months only takes him minutes."

Inspector Halte knew what to do. He would already have consulted some one who was familiar with the stock exchange and banking. He would get information which was valuable, and he would carry out a routine which, in the end, ought to bring success.

Though they are larger, men are sometimes more elusive than coins. Checks must be cashed, and the point of encashment is a starting point from which the investigator can work onward.

So Cobham was not thinking of that. He was thinking again of the investors. That was not part of his job in one sense. In another it was. He was a man of heart. For a little he thought of writing to Miss Glenne, telling her that it would be cruel and useless to let her hope that the company could be reconstructed. But he gave up that idea in the end. He had a feeling of power to-day. With only the scrappiest of clews he wondered if he could not round up that vanished money and so set the investors on their feet again.

It was possible that Cupolis had meditated a bolt.

His interview that morning with Demetrius, and the later one with the scientist in his laboratory, told him clearly enough what had happened. It had not mattered to the dead swindler whether the process was commercially valuable or not. He had merely used it as a lever to extract money from a selected public. It was possible he knew it was utterly impracticable;

also possible he had once believed in it. Whether he had known Professor Demetrius to be out of his mind or perfectly sane did not matter. He had thrown dust in the eyes of the investors with the formulæ of this once famous physicist. It had been to him at least a lucrative process.

Superintendent Cobham learned at Hindon that the local search had had no results so far. There had been the usual bag of tramps and tourists, but every one had a more or less convincing alibi. The finger-prints in Cupolis's room were negligible and must have been made by the servants and those who would normally have access to that room. Not one had been found in a suspicious position.

The French police had been informed and asked to have a search made in Cupolis's villa at Mentone, now shut up, and Captain Shardel, the chief constable, who was impatiently awaiting Cobham's return, told him of the work done to the moment and asked him for his report.

Cobham told him briefly what he had done; recounted his interview with the banker, the professor, and the scientist, and added that Lord Cramish and Mr. Merton's plans to reconstruct the company were now blown sky-high by the expert's revelation.

"A daring devil!" said Shardel, reluctantly admiring. "He must have known the old chap was potty. Perhaps he made up his mind to close down the show when he heard Demetrius was drawing attention to

himself by his eccentricities. But where does this chap Merton come in? Cramish is business-like enough in his way. But I've only heard of this Merton as being an amateur yachtsman. What can he know of business, and why does he take a lead?"

Cobham smiled. "I have an idea, sir, he is sweet on that young lady who was staying at Tendon Oaks. But I am going to try to find out more about him from Mand."

"Do! I say, Cobham, what a mercy we have no amateurs on in this case. Do you remember the Brolam case, when that silly ass kept getting into our way and supplying clews that led nowhere?—By the way, I hear Mand has got a job."

"I heard he was going to get one, sir. I am glad."

"He seemed bucked too. It's social secretary to Sir Malcolm Goage's wife. You know of old Goage, who made two fortunes out of tin-tacks or something."

Cobham nodded. "Then, sir, I had better go over to see him early to-morrow morning. Merton's gone down to see that lady's father in Somerset."

Shardel nodded. "Well, you have put in some good work. I have to go away for two days. I left my address with Smith. Just keep me in touch, will you?"

"He never asked me if I thought the old professor could have done it," Cobham said to himself as he went home. "I wonder if he is going to have a shot at tracing him!"

Chapter XVI

MR. CORBETT IS SPENDING MONEY

THE next morning found the superintendent speeding over to Tendon Oaks in the police car, attended only by the police chauffeur.

He arrived to find Mand busy packing, but glad to see him nevertheless.

"I wondered if I ought not to go over to tell you I was leaving," Mand said. "I am going to the Goages' this afternoon. But I had written my new address on a postcard for you. Here it is."

Cobham pocketed the card. "Thank you, sir. There was no need for that. I knew you were going. I really came over to ask you something about Mr. Merton."

Mand stared at him. "Mr. Merton; why?"

"For various reasons, sir. Do you know anything about him, except the fact that he is fond of yachting and apparently lost money in this crashed concern?"

"Nothing whatever. I saw him for the first time—in fact, I saw all these guests for the first time—the day before Cupolis was murdered. Cupolis did not talk to me of his business. He was a most fascinating man, as I know to my cost, but that was not because he made finance interesting. It was that he seemed in-

stinctively to know one's interests and tastes. He could talk most delightfully on almost any subject, and it was always *your* subject."

Cobham was interested. "How did he get at you, sir?"

"Old furniture and music," said Mand. "But what I mean is that I never heard of his outside acquaintances until I was asked to invite them down here for a week, or a week-end, as the case may be."

"You wrote to these people then?"

"No, curiously enough, I did not. As a rule I did, but on this occasion he wrote them himself—from Scotland, I think. I had a postcard from him mentioning the names of nine people who were coming."

"You don't know why he took that unusual course?"

"No."

"Have you any idea where he met Merton, and why?"

"Not the least. But I hope you don't suspect Merton. I do not see how he could have done it."

"I don't think the whole nine did it, but I have to inquire about them all," said Cobham, smiling. "I suppose you are no better informed about Cupolis's acquaintance with Corbett?"

"Not a bit."

"You can form no opinion on the question why Cupolis, knowing he had swindled these people, actually asked them here and told them, instead of making a break for it?"

Mand reflected a little, looking puzzled. "No, that seemed to me queer from the start. If he had all this money, why didn't he get off quietly? He could have had a week's start easily before they got wind of it. I suppose he could not have intended suicide and taken less of the dope than was necessary to kill him."

"You mean a dose that would have killed him before use gave his system a certain toleration of the drug?"

"Yes. That he did not take enough to effect his purpose and was killed when unconscious."

"But why should he swindle people and amass money only to take his own life? That is the act of a man who makes a foolish mistake and drags down his friends. It was not the kind of thing a calculating swindler would do while he had still got his liberty."

"That's true. It is very perplexing. If he got all this money, I can't understand it."

Cobham plucked at his lip. "Wait a moment. There is a point may be worth going into, sir. Did he gamble at all, do you know?"

Mand nodded at once. "Yes. We had a man here once who was the inventor of a 'system.' Cupolis talked a great deal to him about it, and I thought what he said indicated a keen interest in play. As a matter of fact, too, he told some stories about his luck at the tables at Monte and elsewhere."

"Now we may be nearer it, sir. He had a villa at Mentone. I suppose you have been there with him?"

Mand shook his head. "No. Apparently he did not entertain there, and he let it for a while. Since I have been with him he has been over twice."

"Lately?"

"About four months ago."

"The investors' money was in his hands then?"

"Oh, yes."

Cobham nodded. "It's quite on the cards that he lost most of his booty there, isn't it?"

"I think it is quite possible," said Mand.

The superintendent thanked him, took the hand the other extended, and prepared to go.

"Well, I wish you luck in your new post, sir. I suppose you are shutting up the place?"

"Yes. Fortunately, I had enough to pay off the servants. I wonder if you think you ought to have the keys? The owner, Sir Burpham Green, is abroad, and we have it for some time yet."

"Thank you. I should like them," said Cobham. "I shall write to the owner and mention the fact that you have handed them to me."

Mand excused himself and went out, to return presently with the keys, for which Cobham gave him a receipt. Then the latter said good-by and returned to his car and so to Hindon.

When he entered the police station, Sergeant Smith came to him at once.

"A report, sir, from the man who was watching Mr. Corbett."

"Thanks. Any others?"

"No, sir."

The report was brief. Mr. Corbett did not seem to be very gloomy. He had just sold his old car and bought a new "Twenty." He had just left for London, after one night at home, and the watcher had noticed that his trunks at the station were labeled for the Grand Metropole Hotel, one of the newest and biggest places in Piccadilly. He was following as instructed.

Cobham hummed and meditated for quite a long time, then he wired to his man and settled down to other business, the while he stirred a large bunch of keys in his pocket and listened absently to their clink.

It was afternoon before a parcel and a letter came to him from Kensington. He opened the parcel first and sat looking at the large jar he had deposited in the Natural History Museum the day before.

The grapnel was still there, but it was clean now, and Cobham took it out and examined it under his magnifying glass for a long time. Then he replaced it in the jar, locked that in a cupboard, and opened the letter which had accompanied the parcel. The tune he had been humming changed. It was now the melody of a popular music-hall song: "All sorts and kinds of fish, from whiting to a pike."

"So it *is* fish spawn," said he to himself suddenly. "Well, well, well! But it's not caviare to the general this time!"

He took out a book in which he made private notes

on the case and copied in the report about the fish spawn. Then he locked that book away and read the report once more.

Two not very informative reports came in during the rest of the day, one with regard to Smith and one about Colper. Inspector Halte rang up from London. He had discovered that two parcels of stock had been sold by Mr. Cupolis five months ago and the proceedings invested in Cambellan Art Silk shares. He had found that these shares were sold a fortnight later and the proceeds banked with a Scotch bank in Edinburgh. He was on the point of going north to see what had happened after that.

Cobham smiled. He meant to do a little natural history investigation on his own next day, and before he went to bed he had arranged with the local angling society for the assistance of their keeper and the expert from Mr. Holt's fish hatchery.

These two met him next morning by appointment and the whole party set off for Tendon Oaks in the police car.

When they arrived there, they left the car on the drive, and the keeper and pisciculturist took with them the impedimenta they had brought in the car, including a small drag net and a larger net used for capturing parent fish in the spawning season.

"Don't expect to find another corpse, do you, sir?" asked the keeper as they arrived at the end of the pond.

"No, we're after live bait this time," he replied.

"Any particular kind, superintendent?" asked the pisciculturist with a laugh.

"Roach, please," said Cobham, smiling.

He helped them at first with the large net, but stood aside when the net was brought up with its live freight, and the expert took up the catch fish by fish and examined them, sorting out the females, marking the males, and putting them back into the pond.

They dragged the waters of the pond a good many times, and when they had finished the superintendent cast a warning glance at the man from the hatchery to hint that the keeper was not to be let into their secrets.

"I want a written report, please," he said. "I want it to be clear and unmistakable, signed with your name."

"Very well," said the expert. "Now you want some spawn, don't you? Spawning has been a bit late this year."

"Roach spawn particularly," said Cobham.

The keeper scratched his head. He could not see why the police wanted fish spawn. For the moment he was inclined to believe that the benevolent superintendent intended to start an angling club among the police and was anxious to get stock from this pond.

Cobham did not enlighten him. The expert with the drag net fished up various samples of spawn, put them in small jars, put the jars in a bag, and informed them that he was ready for home.

"I can let you have that report the day after tomorrow, Inspector," he said as they picked up their impedimenta and returned to the car.

"Good! I shall be glad of it."

"Are you coming with us?"

"No. The driver will take you over and come back for me a little later."

So the pisciculturist and the mystified keeper left, and the superintendent let himself in at the front door of the mansion and stood for a moment in the hall listening.

He knew that Mand had gone and the servants. But it was unlikely that the house had been left empty. Probably a caretaker was in charge.

As he moved down the hall, he heard a back door slam. He found a bell-push, pressed it, and was joined in the hall a few minutes later by an underkeeper, whom he knew slightly.

"Ah, you're here in charge," he said lightly.

"But how did you get in, sir?"

"With these little keys, my dear fellow. Are you alone?"

"No, the missus and the kid have moved in with me, sir—only May's at school and the missus has gone over to get one of the things she left."

Cobham smiled. "Well, I shall be here for some time."

"Want any help, sir?"

"None, thank you. You carry on with your job and I'll attend to mine."

"Very well, sir."

The caretaker went off. He would have liked to stop and watch the superintendent at work, but he knew that the latter could be very sharp on occasion.

Cobham shut the front door and strolled into the music room. He looked hard at the organ for a little, placed a chair on top of a table, putting a rug over the table surface to prevent it from getting scratched, and another rug on the seat of the chair. Then he climbed up and tried to fish in the tops of the pipes.

After a while he satisfied himself that there was nothing there and got down. He had out all the books from the shelves next, without result, and finally examined every piece of furniture in the room.

"Let me see," he mused, when he had turned the place inside out, "Merton slept next to Mand, and I think I shall have a look at his room once more."

He mounted the stairs and went along a passage until he came to the room formerly occupied by Clive Merton. Here he was very thorough, lifting the carpet, and stamping to detect creaking or loose boards, searching on top of the wardrobe, and finally looking very hard at the chairs. They were of an old-fashioned pattern, and one in particular attracted his attention.

"An odd one," he said to himself.

He began to hum "A ché la morte." Italian opera was one of his passions.

As he stared at it, a little gleam came into his eyes. He knelt down beside it and looked at every bit of it with a magnifying glass.

"Good for you, old fellow!" he said to himself genially. "It certainly seems to hang together.—Nasty, ominous word is 'hang' though!"

He rubbed his hands, marked a tiny and inconspicuous cross on the underside of the chair and left the room.

"I think it is up to me to see Mr. Merton," he said. "A bit of a journey, and rather a bore just now, but it must be done."

He had some time to spare before the car would come back for him, and spent it in Mand's room, or rather on the ledge outside the window of Mr. Cupolis's former chamber. He managed there to get impressions of the grapnel scratches on a piece of wax, and packed that carefully in a case in his pocket.

"Merton is with those Glennes," he said, as at last he went out to the drive to await the car. "If he is still there. I must wire when I get back, saying I shall run down to-morrow. I think our car will take me there faster than a train and a change."

Chapter XVII

HOPE IS DASHED

CLIVE MERTON had found Mary's father a very courageous invalid, and a host who, in spite of his terrible losses, kept a stiff upper lip and a hold on his feelings.

He spoke of Heal, whom they both knew. He told Mary that it was best to look on the bright side. But, when Clive was alone with him after dinner, on the second day after his arrival, he told the young man frankly that he feared the worst.

"So do I, as far as the Cupolis company is concerned at present," said Clive. "But I told you what Lord Cramish and I hoped to do. To-morrow I think I shall go to town and see him. He was to see this Professor Demetrius, I think. If Demetrius is right, this crash has not invalidated the process. It is worth as much as ever."

"Do you think it is?" said the invalid wistfully.

"Why not?"

"Because there is something in the paper this morning that worries me."

"I didn't see it then."

"Perhaps not. It was a small paragraph, Mr. Merton. It appears that one of these reporters was

told off to write up—is that the word?—yes, write up this case about Cupolis. He seems to have had an interview with a scientific man, and asked him what he thought of Demetrius's process."

"It does not follow that these fellows agree with each other, sir. Look at the bitter controversies there are among experts."

"I know, Merton. I don't say he is not right or is right. But it worries me all the same."

"What was said, sir?"

"Very little but of a negative kind. The man interviewed told the reporter that he had nothing to say. When the reporter pressed him, he shrugged and laughed, according to the account, and remarked that Professor Demetrius was not a connoisseur of swans. What could he mean by that, do you think?"

Clive bit his lip. "I should say, sir, it meant that Professor Demetrius could not tell a goose from a swan—in other words, thought all his discoveries more important than they were."

"There!"

"But we must not attach too much significance to a report of that kind, sir."

A servant came in with a telegram. It was from Lord Cramish to Clive Merton.

Clive excused himself and read it with a growing frown.

"I say, sir. This is from Cramish. May I read it to you?"

"Do please, my boy."

Clive read out the wire clearly and slowly.

"Have had short interview with D. Very unsatisfactory. Unable to get details owing excitement of D. Does not impress as sound or careful thinker. Appears have sort persecution mania. Will see him again when calmer."

The two men at the dinner table stared at each other.

"What does that mean?" asked the host.

"Difficult to say, sir. On the face of it, I should say Professor Demetrius is an excitable foreigner, *is* excited, because the other scientist queers his pitch, and also because this crash has come to stop operations. Cramish did not strike me as the kind of man to conciliate an excitable Czech. He is too downright and unimaginative himself."

"But it does not look hopeful, does it?"

"I can't say. We must wait for the second interview."

If Clive Merton had been attracted by Mary Glenne, there was no doubt that the attraction was mutual. Mary had felt very glad when her father took to the visitor. She herself relied on Clive to help them out of their difficulty. She looked up to him as a man who had courage and foresight. She herself would never have thought of refusing to accept the crash as final.

He cheered her father up wonderfully. She herself felt cheered by him and did not attempt to disguise

that or her liking. There had been moments, on the morning after Mr. Cupolis had been found dead, when she had been doubtful about him. But that feeling had passed, and she was more than glad she had accepted his offer to return with her and explain matters to her invalid father.

She knew now that love is not always a plant of slow growth. It is true that he was good looking enough to attract many women, but it was not only his good looks that attracted her, any more than it was her courage, backed by her physical attractions, that appealed to Clive. Something in each of them called to the other.

"I suppose you can't think of any solution of this murder?" she asked him as they strolled about the pretty cliff garden the next morning. "Or what has become of our money?"

"I expect he spent the money in riotous living," said Clive bitterly. "As for the other thing, it was as nearly justifiable as any homicide can be."

"But you don't believe it is justifiable?"

"At least I have no idea what was done or how it was done," he replied, frowning. "I am afraid I have no deductive gifts. Perhaps it is just as well, for the police hate people interfering."

"I can't get it out of my head that poor old Professor Logard may have done it," she said. "I know about the footprints and the marks on the ledges, but what about that dagger and the state he was in? Isn't there such a thing as a man going temporarily off his

head and committing a murder without knowing it?"

"It's the sort of defense that would be put up in the United States, certainly. I suppose it was possible. But it won't do to assume such a thing. We might as well say it was done from the outside by this Professor Demetrius. According to Cramish, he is in a very excited state."

"Could that be true?"

He smiled and shrugged. "I only meant that it was as likely as your theory. At any rate I have decided to stay here to-day and go to town to-morrow. I shall see Demetrius myself and try the soothing syrup method; which Cramish would not do. I want to convince myself that the process is worthless before I give up the idea of reconstruction."

The talk then turned to other and more pleasant topics, and Mary smiled happily later when he told her he hoped to come down again after his London trip to tell them of his progress.

"I am going to speak to your father about the money this afternoon," he said. "Leave me alone with him after lunch, will you?"

His talk with her father proved more satisfactory than he had hoped. His host was willing to accept a certain sum to put into the company, if it was reconstructed, but only on condition that Clive took the deeds of his house as collateral security.

Clive accepted that arrangement. It might be altered later. He assured himself that the Glennes were not

without funds for their present necessities and dropped the question again. He went for a walk with Mary before dinner, and when they returned they found a second telegram awaiting them.

This was from Superintendent Cobham, and informed Clive that he was driving over from Hindon next day and would be glad of an interview.

"Why is he following you down here?" Mary asked him in surprise.

He frowned and stared again at the telegram. "Hanged if I know. But I suppose I must see him."

"I think he's stupid."

He forced a smile. "You thought him very nice a few days ago."

"Nice to me," she said, and then blushed. "I mean it is stupid of him to worry you. What have you to do with it?"

Clive bit his lip. "I don't suppose one can expect great things from a provincial policeman," he said. "They don't get the experience men do in town. The man himself struck me as being a bit of a talker; fond of airing his views. Heaven knows what he is up to now."

"But you will see him?"

"Of course. He is in charge of the case. I must put my visit to town off for a day."

"Or you might go later, if he comes early."

"I could do that. Now I must change. I don't think you need tell your father. It will only worry him."

"No?"

"I think not. When Cobham comes I can arrange to be on the look-out and see him outside. Your father has quite enough to think of just now."

Mary agreed after a moment's hesitation.

"Very well. I won't, unless he knows a wire has come."

Roughly calculating the time at which Cobham might arrive, if he started at nine o'clock, Clive Merton hung about on the only lane leading to the house until half-past twelve.

He was not in the best of tempers as he waited. He puffed gustily at a pipe, struck off the heads of many unoffending wayside flowers with his stick, and gloomed into space.

He was wondering what Cobham thought he knew or had discovered. The whole thing would worry Mary. It would worry her father still more if it came to his ears. Lunch was at one and, even if that policeman came now, he could hardly be in time for it. That would mean a troublesome explanation.

It was twenty-five to one when he heard the sound of a fast car approaching, and looked up the lane. In half a minute a car came in sight, driven by a policeman in plain clothes, and containing the redoubtable superintendent.

Clive waved his stick, and the driver hastily put on his brakes. The car slid to a standstill, and Cobham rose in his seat to see what had stopped them.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Merton," he cried, opening the door and hopping out briskly.

"I came to meet you," said Clive; "I didn't want my host to know that you were coming."

"Oh, that's all right," said Cobham. "We can have a stroll about." He turned to the driver, told him to wait till he returned, and nodded towards the distant cliff.

"Let's go along there, sir. There is sure to be a path. Here's a gate. We can cut across this field."

They passed through the gate and Clive turned to his companion somewhat impatiently.

"What is the matter now?"

Cobham took a sidelong glance at him. "I saw Professor Demetrius the other day, sir. I am sorry to say that he is not the man I expected."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean bluntly, sir, that he carried on like a madman, and when I consulted an expert he assured me that the professor has been very eccentric for some time."

Clive shrugged. "That may be. But very eccentric people have made good before now."

"I know, sir. It is not that. I heard from the same very sound source that his process is a laughing-stock among the gentlemen who are in the know. They admit that he is a clever man, a great man once, but they say he has had his head turned by the war."

"Beastly for us," said Clive bitterly, "but you didn't come all the way here to tell me that, did you?"

"No, sir," said Cobham, with the sort of indulgent tone one uses to a fractious child. No, sir, by no means.—Only, as you had hopes of reconstruction, I thought you would like to know."

Clive nodded. "Much obliged, though it is the sort of news a prisoner gets when he is told he is to be hanged!"

Cobham smiled.

"We won't talk about hanging, sir, if you please. But you are right, sir. I didn't come here merely to tell you that. I wanted to ask you a question or two regarding your connection with Cupolis."

Merton gave him a sharp glance. "Very well. What do you want to know?"

"Where you met him, sir, and when, and if you had much to do with him. Like the others, I think you agree he was very fascinating. Mr. Mand, who has now gone off to that post in town, says Cupolis seemed to know exactly the subject that would interest the man he was speaking to. Did you think so?"

Clive reflected. "Let me take those questions in order. When did I meet Cupolis first—I think it was about a year and a half ago. Yes. A man called Heal had met him and introduced me. I know now that Heal is a friend of Miss Glenne's father, so I suppose that is how he got to know him too."

"Is this Mr. Heal a sound man?"

"Absolutely, and a wealthy man. No one could suspect him of being in league with Cupolis," said

Clive decidedly. "As to the fellow's being very clever in getting at you, I agree with Mand. When we met first, Cupolis was very full of yachting. He talked of buying a boat and asked me to give him hints. I suppose I was ass enough to be flattered."

"Is that the only time you saw him?"

"I met him once after that at Heal's club. That was the time I heard of the new process and agreed to invest. I imagine Heal also put some money into it."

They were now on the cliff path and Cobham looked out to sea and spoke in a very casual voice.

"Ah, he was cunning. He found Mand was fond of music and old furniture and played on that string with him." He turned very suddenly and added: "I suppose you are not interested in old furniture, Mr. Merton?"

Clive did not reply at once. He looked hard at Cobham, as if asking himself where the catch was, and then frowned a little.

"Not especially. I suppose like any other educated man I like seeing a good piece, though I don't know anything about the real points."

Cobham looked at him very innocently. "The old gentleman who owns Tendon Oaks has some fine pieces there," he commented. "Did you notice the furniture in your bedroom, the chairs with the wheel backs and one odd one with straight up and down—"

Clive interrupted him resentfully. "Look here, superintendent, I am not an utter ass! If you are try-

ing to get some information from me, why not put it to me frankly."

"I was only wondering if you noticed that odd chair, sir," said Cobham, looking far more surprised than he felt. "It struck me as being a fine thing of its kind."

Clive snorted. "My dear fellow, I can see you are after something. If it is any satisfaction to you I did not notice any chairs, odd or even."

"You are sure of that, sir?"

Clive smiled. "Ah, I thought you were after something! But just think it over! I arrived to find that Cupolis was not to be seen; on the way down some of us had been wondering if anything was wrong. After dinner we were told the worst, and next morning we hear that Cupolis has been murdered. In those circumstances, do you expect me to have noticed what kind of chairs were in my bedroom?"

Cobham nodded, then changed the subject without apology. "Do you still stick to it that Mr. Mand snores? He denies it altogether."

"Well, I heard him."

Cobham shook his head. "A day or two ago Sergeant Smith and I made an experiment. It proved to us that it is impossible for a sound of that kind to be heard from your room when the door is closed. I suppose you did not leave your door open?"

"No," said Clive shortly.

"On the other hand," said Cobham quietly, "I think you must have been deceived by some sound outside.

One of the servants told me some of the gutters on the eaves make odd sounds in heavy storms, gurgling and grunting sounds. That must have been what you heard."

Clive shrugged. "Well, if Mand does not snore, and a snore cannot be heard in my room, then I suppose you are right. But it sounded like snores."

Cobham turned on his heel and began to walk back. "It's wonderful how confusing noises are in an old house at night," he said. "Well, sir, I have not kept you from your lunch, I hope. It is near one now, and I must get back."

Clive smiled faintly. "I hope you are wiser, superintendent."

"A great deal, sir, I hope," said Cobham.

Chapter XVIII

A LADY VOLUNTEERS SOME INFORMATION

A REPLY from the French police with regard to their search of the villa in Mentone did not add anything to Superintendent Cobham's store of knowledge. The place held nothing which could throw the slightest light upon either the murder or the missing money.

Cobham pigeon-holed that communication and opened another which had come by the same post. This came from a village fifteen miles from Hindon, and was headed with the name of a country house. It ran as follows:

"Grackley Hall,
"Furthernmost.

"Sir—If you care to call here I may be able to give you some information with regard to the late Mr. Cupolis.

"Yours truly,
"Mary Hassen."

Cobham weighed the words carefully. Almost every post brought shoals of communications of amateurs and others who had a complete solution of the mystery

or information which was sure to lead ultimately to the arrest of the murderer. Indeed, one gentleman had stated that he had seen Mr. Cupolis in town once in company with a savage-looking man, an obvious ruffian. Unfortunately his description of this potential criminal tallied exactly with that of Professor Demetrius.

Mrs. Hassen, however, was the lady of the manor at Furthernmost, and a woman of intelligence. Cobham decided to see her, and drove over at once.

Grackley Hall was one of the show places of the district. Its chatelaine, Mrs. Hassen, was tall, fifty years of age, a stylish woman, and something of a globe-trotter.

She received Cobham graciously, asked him to sit down, and at once began by saying that he must not take it that what she knew was definite.

"Only I thought it might be a help to you," she added. "You see, all the papers say that Mr. Cupolis, who seems to have been a dreadful sort of man, received a great deal of money from these poor investors."

"About two hundred thousand," said Cobham.

"Good gracious! How hateful for them! At any rate, my paper says all this money has disappeared. They don't think the murderer took it, do they?"

"No," said Cobham, with a smile; "I don't think Cupolis had it in the house, madam."

She nodded. "Then what I am going to tell you

may be right. Perhaps you know that I have a house at Cannes?"

"I have heard so, madam."

"I was there most of the winter. Now, I am not like so many people who spend half their time in the Casino at Monte Carlo. I go to the Riviera for the sun, you know. But, of course, I do visit the Casino at times, and when I have friends staying with me, I go oftener, of course."

"I see."

"Well, in January last I had a friend with me who wanted to try some system. He has plenty of money and can afford it. I was rather amused watching him on several occasions, but I grew tired of that at last and noticed that a crowd was congregated behind a man who was gambling heavily at another table."

"Ah!" interjected Cobham, beginning to sit up and take notice.

"Yes. He was a foreign-looking man, and he was simply losing money in handfuls. Nothing seemed to stop him. When he lost one pile he put on more, and he never once appeared to win even the smallest stake. My friend saw him playing again later and swore he was a Greek."

"He lost heavily?"

"So they said. And people told me he had been losing heavily for a week. The moment he came in people used to stand behind him. He was said to be

the most consistent loser and the most reckless player ever seen in the rooms."

"Well?"

"Well, I began to wonder if that was not Mr. Cupolis. You see, my friend heard afterwards that the gambler was a Greek with some name that ended in 'upolis' or 'oupolis,' who was staying at Mentone."

"Good!" said Cobham. "I was beginning to wonder where the money went. But, of course, you have seen a photograph in the newspapers of the late Mr. Cupolis."

"Yes. It was blurred rather, as these things are, and I never really had a close look at the gambler. You see, he was at the tables when we left each time, but I am sure the photograph looked very like him, and Mr. Cupolis did stay at Mentone, as the reports say so."

Cobham left her soon after. It was quite possible that Cupolis had squandered the investors' money at the tables. He had already thought of that. If it were true, then good-by to his hopes of tracing the lost fortune and setting the ruined ones on their feet again.

When he got back, another report had come in from Inspector Halte. The latter had traced the money realized from the silk shares through another transaction in war bonds, and a sale of the war bonds for cash. This cash, ten thousand pounds odd, had been converted

into French money in thousand franc notes. At that point the trail had ended. Halte was now going back to London to trace other shares to their ultimate lairs.

Cobham hummed a sad melody over that. "It looks to me," he said to himself, "as if those thousand franc notes dived into the exchequer of the Casino at Monte Carlo and are lost to view."

He rang up Mrs. Hassen. She was quite certain that she had seen the Greek buying counters to the value of hundreds of thousands of francs and paying for them with thousand franc notes. He could not doubt her word. There was no reason why she should invent the incident.

There was also the report from the man watching Corbett. It was enlightening from the fact that it confirmed Corbett's remark to Andrews that he had had a good win. The official informant understood the win to be five thousand on a double.

The superintendent presently put all these things aside and concentrated on a report which had just come in from the pisciculturist who had accompanied him to the pond in the park. He brightened up on reading it and began to hum "The man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo."

Captain Shardel visited him later for a conference, and Cobham found that he had guessed aright. The chief constable had been attempting a little detective work on his own account.

"Being in town anyway, you know, Cobham," he

said casually, "I thought it couldn't do any harm if I tried to trace old Demetrius's movements about the time of the murder."

Cobham suppressed a smile. "Very useful, sir," he said.

"It ought to have been, I admit, but I am afraid I didn't find very much, Cobham. Nothing very vital, of course, I mean.—I did get at one point, though, where he misled you."

"Really, sir?"

"I think so. You see, the old chap had been in Scotland, though apparently he denied it to you."

"But why should he?" Cobham pricked up his ears.

"There you have me."

"How did you find out this, sir?"

Shardel laughed. "I couldn't think of any way of getting the information at first, then it occurred to me to try some of his friends. I found the name of the one he stayed with in Surrey and went down to see him."

"Good, sir! You remember Cupolis had just come back from Scotland when he met his death."

"Of course. Well, this friend is English, but has lived in Czecho-Slovakia, and knew Demetrius in Prague. I asked him straight out if he had had a letter from the old chap addressed from Scotland, and he said he had—from Glasgow."

"But, according to Mand, Cupolis had been in Edinburgh."

"I know. But that is all I discovered. Only, if Demetrius told you he was not in Scotland, he seems to have something to hide."

"It depends when he left Scotland and if he came this way, sir. If he only left on the afternoon before the murder, he could hardly have reached Tendon Oaks in time to do it."

"But why is he keeping that visit dark? It would be a good idea for a man who intended to do in Cupolis to get here by a very circuitous route."

"Well, sir, it is suspicious certainly, and I had better see him again. I threatened him last time that I would make him explain his movements. I gave him two days to communicate with me, but have not heard from him. This time I'll hear the truth or frighten him out of a year's growth!"

"That's right." Shardel laughed. "Now let me hear what you have done."

Cobham told him at once of his visit to Merton and also of the information vouchsafed to him by Mrs. Hassen and the report from Inspector Halte.

"You see, sir," he added, "there is a possibility that the man was the Greek she saw, and simply got into the hole he did by gambling away the investors' money. To make it harder to trace, he kept on selling out of one stock into another, until he finally turned the funds into French francs."

Shardel nodded. "Well, that's pretty useful, I must say. Still, the final disposition of the funds does not

give us any clew to the murderer. Demetrius seems to be potty and had a grievance against Cupolis. He might have done it. But look here, do you think you have eliminated any of that gang?"

"The guests, you mean, sir?"

"Yes, of course."

Cobham nodded. "I make mistakes like most people, but I think it is clear in my mind—without definitely discriminating against the others, sir—that Miss Glenne, Andrews, Colper, Lord Cramish and Mr. Smith can be left out of it."

"Smith, eh? Why, didn't he go down to the library?"

"Yes, sir, but we are agreed that the murder could not have been committed with that poniard. I have the medical men to agree with me in that, though they did not let it out at the inquest. Then Smith told others of the guests that he had been in the library that night. No one had seen him go down. If he had committed the murder, he wouldn't have let that out. No, sir, he was not in it, I am sure."

"So you still suspect Merton, Corbett and the professor? Well, here's another professor to suspect—an odd coincidence. I think you had better get on his tracks right away, unless you would like to send Sergeant Smith up to town."

"No, sir. I shall go myself. By the way, I have the grapnel here, and I want you to have a look at it. There is something that puzzles me, and if you can

think of an explanation, sir, while I am away, I shall be glad to hear it."

Shardel nodded. "Splendid! I'll have to sharpen my wits if I am to keep level with you, Cobham."

Cobham smiled, opened the cupboard and produced the jar. He fished the grapnel from it, laid it on a clean piece of paper and produced a magnifying glass.

"Now, sir, will you look at that very carefully, and give me your opinion?"

Shardel took the magnifier and went over the grapnel inch by inch.

"I don't see very much that is noticeable about it," he remarked at last. "It is small, but strong, and it certainly has been used at the end of a cord, or what is this ring for? Beyond that—nothing."

The superintendent explained. "I mean the surface of the metal, sir, especially in the inner side of the ring and other parts. It doesn't look like burnished steel, does it."

"But then it has been in the water, Cobham."

"I know, sir, but look again and give me your idea."

Shardel considered for a moment or two and then looked up. "I suppose you don't mean what looks like a slight oiliness?"

"I do, sir. It looks to me as if the whole thing had once had a slight filament of oil over it. It has been rubbed off in parts, but some remains, though very slight."

"We had better have it sent to an analyst. He can

perhaps tell us if it is oil. Meantime, I will try to see what bearing it could have on the case. At present I confess that I have no idea what oil on it could mean."

"I'll get it sent to the county analyst, sir," said Cobham. "I suppose I can go to town at once."

"The sooner the better," said Shardel.

Chapter XIX

PERSECUTION MANIA

WHEN Superintendent Cobham again found himself facing an interview with the irritable scientist, he put on a face of extreme severity and looked a dangerous man to tamper with.

When Demetrius appeared, he also looked dangerous. He had had two interviews with Lord Cramish and one with Clive Merton, and he had lost his head on each of those three occasions. Lord Cramish's abrupt methods had put him in a fury; Clive Merton's soothing attempts to get information had filled him with suspicion, which had ended in his calling Clive a sneak-thief, a picker of other men's brains, and other things that sounded even worse in the language of the Czech.

So when he saw the superintendent again, he promptly burst into a torrent of language, his neck swelling like that of an irate turkey cock.

Cobham sat down and listened till the little man was breathless. Then he rose to his full height, strode up to the aggrieved one and pointed at him dramatically.

"What were you doing in Scotland last week?"

Worry and fury combined had put Demetrius almost on the verge of a collapse.

This burly and menacing figure was the last straw. The professor sat down hastily and buried his face in his hands.

Cobham sat down again. "Now, sir, this is very serious, and I have to have an answer. When I asked you last if you had been in Scotland you denied it. But I know you were in Glasgow. I have undeniable evidence of that. If you are not careful, sir—and I warn you here and now to be very careful—you may find yourself in a very awkward position."

The professor raised a much subdued face. "Ach, and what if I was in Schottland?" he almost wailed. "Cannot I not to Schottland without question go?"

Cobham took a calmer tone. "Very good, sir. You were in Scotland. How long were you there, and which way did you return?"

Demetrius licked his lips. "I was travel two days and two days there. I stay with Herr Macphersson. You can him ask."

"And when did you return?"

"The day you have seen me. I come back by a rapid train. I come back here. Mr. Macphersson tell you he sees me off at the *bahn*—the *gare*—the station—Glasgow station."

"And who is Mr. Macpherson, may I ask, sir?"

Demetrius hesitated, glared, then replied: "He is maker of chemicals. He is well known."

Cobham noted the name. "Now, sir, that is all very satisfactory as far as it goes. But I haven't heard yet why you denied this in the first instance. Cupolis is dead; we know you had had a row with him."

"I tell him to go to *der teufel!*" said Demetrius, getting his hackles up again. "I tell him that. As for the other, are you really of the politzei—the police?"

Cobham took a card from his pocket. The professor studied it for a moment, then looked relieved.

"I see," he said in a confidential tone and moved his chair nearer to Cobham's. "You are official and I tell you something. Others have tried to pump me—"

"Pump you?"

"Ah, pump me, that is it. One man comes and says he is a lord two times, another comes and says he is a friend of mine, anxious to help me."

He looked cunningly at Cobham and tapped the side of his nose twice.

"But they are not the only. No! Since I come to this country many try to steal my secret. This Cupolis gets it, and then he will not get on with the work. These others, scientists and chemists calling themselves lords, they are after it to suck my brains. *Donnerwetter noch einmal!* The place is full of spies and robbers."

"Really, sir?"

"But yes. I cannot shake them off. They follow me to learn my secret. Ach! I tell you now that I did not formerly believe you to the police belong.

Nein! I think you are one of them! I go to Glasgow to see that manufacturer of chemical, to see if he will work my process. But I have to be secret. That is why I say I have not been there."

Had the case been other than it was, Cobham could have burst into laughter on the spot. The little man's voice carried conviction. There was no longer any doubt that he was mentally unbalanced, suffering from persecution mania, believing that every man's hand was against him and his Utopian invention. He had seen in the superintendent a spy of some imaginary rival, anxious to queer what he hoped would be a deal with the chemical manufacturer in Glasgow, and had tried to cover up his tracks with a sort of childish cunning.

This was not, of course, a mere idea on Cobham's part. He had been given the man's name, and he had only to communicate with Glasgow to prove the professor's assertion one way or another. The thing was only tragic in the sense that it showed how little importance could be attached to a process that was a manifestation of the unfortunate scientist's mania.

He rose. "Thank you, sir. I believe you, and I assure you that you will not be troubled again by us."

Professor Demetrius received his apology with surprising good nature. In the last few minutes he had realized that he might be placed in a very uncomfortable position. Like so many who suffer from mental aberrations, he was sharp enough in many ways.

Cobham got away from him with relief, but went no

farther than the nearest post office, where he looked up the Glasgow telephone directory, and found Mr. Macpherson, a chemical manufacturer. He got through a trunk call within ten minutes.

Mr. Macpherson at once agreed that Professor Demetrius had visited him, and confirmed the latter's account of the day on which he had left Glasgow.

"I was sorry for the little man," he said. "I had heard he was running some process for that fellow Cupolis, and though the idea appeared absurd to me, I thought there must be something in it, since it had that financial backing. When Cupolis's affairs came out, of course, I thought there might be a flaw. Still, some one put him on to me, and I had him down here."

"There was nothing in it?"

"Air! Hot air! I could hardly get a sensible word out of him, and I didn't understand his process when he had talked to me for hours about it. And then he was so suspicious, and so sure he was going to have the thing stolen, that it was really uncomfortable work talking to him. In the end I had him stay another day, but I made up my mind he was quite mad."

Cobham smiled to himself. "At all events, his story tallies with yours, sir, and that is all I want."

His visit to London had been both satisfactory and unsatisfactory. It was something at least to have eliminated another suspect, for the multiplication of possible murderers is the thing that fogs a detective most.

It occurred to him, however, to visit Scotland Yard before he returned. London headquarters was always helpful when appealed to, and he knew that the officers there would know the details of the Tendon Oaks crime by now almost as well as himself.

And it was at Scotland Yard that he was to receive the greatest surprise yet.

He was received with some interest by an officer whom he knew slightly. The latter had once come down to Hindon in search of a motor thief, who was suspected of a larger crime.

"Well, superintendent," said the Londoner, "how goes the murder?"

"Not badly," said Cobham. "I have a few loose ends to tie up, but on the whole I am not ill pleased."

"I suppose you wouldn't call it suicide?" said the other.

"I certainly should not."

"But there was that dagger you found in the room."

Cobham grinned. "We didn't give everything away at the inquest. Between you and me, that dagger had nothing to do with it."

"Can you prove that beyond doubt?"

"I think so. And the police surgeon is sure of it. Why do you ask? I know you chaps do pull off some wonderful coups, but it will need some talk to convince me that Cupolis killed himself."

The other man laughed. "Oh, I don't say he did. But a bit of what may be evidence for you came our

way the other day when we were investigating another case. Only this morning I heard more of it and was thinking of letting you know."

"Why wasn't it offered to us?"

"Well, the fellow who knows about it isn't sure. He is an ironmonger, a very respectable fellow, and these tradesmen don't like to be hauled into court for nothing. Our man was investigating some pilfering for him and they got into talk."

Cobham was keen and eager now. "About my case?"

"Well, in a way, yes. This ironmonger had read in the papers about the grapnel you found, and he had sold a grapnel about that size some months ago—at least he had had it made for a customer."

"Good heavens!" cried Cobham. "That's news! Go on!"

"This morning our man tells me the ironmonger brought him a paper with a photograph in it, and he said he would be pretty ready to swear it was that of the man who bought the grapnel."

"Who?" cried Cobham, almost shouting in his excitement.

"Cupolis, my dear fellow! A Greek, though he gave his name as Dubois."

Chapter XX

DID CUPOLIS KILL HIMSELF?

IT is sometimes said that Scotland Yard despises the provincial police, and that the provincial forces regard Scotland Yard as a much overrated institution. But there was no triumph or contempt in the London officer's eyes as he saw what a blow his statement was to the Hindon superintendent.

"We're all apt to get these rubs," he said, as Cobham sat ruefully thinking it over, "and you may be able to square this with your own theories later. As it is, suicide seems more likely than we once thought."

Cobham shrugged. "You aren't suggesting that Cupolis got a grapnel, climbed up and down for fun, and then killed himself?"

"I don't know anything about it. I suggest that you should have a talk yourself with this ironmonger chap. He is pretty certain he sold the thing to Cupolis, and Cupolis must have wanted it for some suspicious purpose, or he wouldn't have given a false name, would he?"

Cobham scratched his head. "This is a nice business. But you are right. I ought to see this man at once. Can you give me his address?"

The chief inspector, to whom he had been talking,

looked at his watch. "I'll come along with you, if you like," he said. "One of our cars will buzz us there. It's some distance out, beyond Hammersmith."

"I'll be glad if you will," said Cobham, still worrying over this new development. "If I can use your telephone, I'll tell my people at Hindon I am not coming back to-night, and also get on to one of my fellows who is here in town."

He rang up Hindon, made an appointment later to meet Inspector Halte at his hotel that evening, and then left with the chief inspector.

"There is only one thing in this theory of suicide that seems to fit the facts as I know them," said Cobham as they drove along. "I have been wondering why Cupolis invited these people to his house only to let them know he had ruined them. If he was going to commit suicide, he might regard that as a sort of penance for what he had done."

The other man nodded. "It was that puzzled me when I first read the details of your case."

The chief inspector knew too well the etiquette of his profession to intrude any theories of his own. Cobham shrugged.

"The theory might then be that Cupolis had taken a dose of the drug that failed to kill him. When he recovered from the dope, he remembered his purpose, went down to the library and got the poniard to do it with.—But I don't believe it!"

The chief inspector only smiled.

When they reached the ironmonger's, Cobham was introduced to the owner, a keen-looking little man, with an appearance of knowing his own mind.

"Superintendent Cobham is in charge of the Tendon Oaks murder case," said the introducer. "I told him what you had said about the man for whom you made a grapnel and he is rather interested."

The ironmonger nodded. "I've looked at that picture in the newspaper a dozen times since and I am more sure than ever. It's true lots of foreigners look alike to me, but Greeks aren't common here, like French and Italians."

"But he gave his name as Dubois," said Cobham.

"Yes, he did. But he had an odd look and was darker than most Frenchmen I've seen. I took more notice of him because he looked more of a gentleman than his clothes, if you understand what I mean."

"Perfectly. Did he say why he wanted it?"

"No, and I didn't ask. You see, if he had wanted me to get him a revolver or a big knife, I might have put questions, but I never heard of much harm being done with a grapnel."

"But this was a peculiar one, not one with the tines sticking out all round, more like an iron hand with three curved fingers."

"Well, I never asked him. I had it made and sent it on."

"Where did you send it?"

"To Mr. Dubois, 8 Sickley Mews, S.W."

"And that is all you know about it?"

"That's all."

"Would you mind keeping this dark till you hear from me again?"

The ironmonger nodded vigorously. "Indeed I shall be glad to. I am quite busy enough without having the shop filled with gentlemen from the papers."

"Shall we try Sickley Mews?" asked the chief inspector as they left the shop.

"If you don't mind," said Cobham.

Sickley Mews was in Pimlico, and they were not detained very long at No. 8. The woman there admitted that she occasionally took lodgers. She agreed that some months before she had had a lodger called Dubois for a week. She said he was French and very clever. He was a chauffeur, he told her, but her husband said he seemed to know about everything. She identified the photograph of Mr. Cupolis as that of the man calling himself Dubois.

Cobham thanked the chief inspector very cordially for his help and hints and went off to the hotel he frequented when in town to take a room for the night.

Inspector Halte called in during the evening. He was able to report progress, though he seemed rather taken aback when he heard about the purchase of the grapnel.

"Why did he change these stocks and shares to foreign money then, sir, if he was going to commit suicide?" he asked.

Cobham shrugged. "I hear—and it may be true—that he lost a lot of money on the tables at Monte Carlo. But how have you managed?"

"Pretty well, sir, with assistance from various financial gentlemen. I got on to another parcel and it ends the same way."

"In French francs?"

"Foreign money, sir, but this time German marks—about six thousand pounds worth."

The superintendent narrowed his brows. "I am going to take off the men who are watching Colper, Smith, Andrews, Lord Cramish and Corbett," he said. "I have a nice little row to hoe with this new evidence coming forward."

"It's a tremendous tangle, sir."

"Looks like it. Looks like it, Halte; but I haven't been able to give my mind to it properly yet. Who else were we watching?"

"Mand, sir."

"Right. He'll be in town. Take that man off too."

"Very well, sir. I'll see him and tell him that."

When he was alone again, the superintendent began to hum mournfully a melody that sounded something like "Thou'rt passing hence, my brother."

"The nasty part about this new evidence," Cobham mused, "is that it confirms my theory, and also contradicts it. I hate paradoxes. Why should Cupolis need grapnels to climb from his own windows or to climb up to them? Was he in a delirium from the drug,

climbed out, thought he really slept in the room he had formerly used, and tried to get back there, forgetting that Mand had taken it over at his request? That is possible, if unlikely, only for the fact that Cupolis had nines in boots and could not throw the grapnel into the pond from his room! But wait a bit! How do I know that the grapnel was not hung up in some outhouse?"

There might be something in that. A thief would look about for some means of climbing up, perhaps, and not finding a ladder, might think the grapnel useful with a rope or cord rived through the ring at the end. But neither Mand nor any of the servants or people about the house had recognized the grapnel, as they would have done if Cupolis had hung it in an open place.

No. The grapnel was a nuisance to a certain extent, though Cobham still hung some hopes on it.

The next morning he had a telephone message from Hindon. The county analyst's assistant had had no difficulty in deciding that a fine filament of oil had once covered the grapnel.

"Unless the user of it rubbed it over with oil to remove finger-prints, my own theory stands," reflected Cobham. "But now I must get back and see if I can't make this new evidence dovetail with the old."

Chapter XXI

THE RUEFUL INVESTORS

LORD CRAMISH had decided to convene a meeting of the shareholders who had been guests at the mansion when Cupolis was murdered.

Mary and her father received a letter from him, and one from Merton, who had already interviewed Professor Demetrius with little result. They talked over it together and, Colonel Glenne feeling better than usual, they decided to go up to town together, so that Mary could attend the meeting and have her father at hand if any hurried decisions had to be made.

"I am afraid it looks bad, my dear," said Colonel Glenne to his daughter during the evening of their first day in town. "No one seems to get any satisfaction out of this foreign scientist, and I begin to wonder if we shall ever see our money back. I think it would be really wiser to put our house in the hands of the agents. It ought to fetch five thousand, and we certainly cannot keep it up if we do not recover the money."

Mary looked more hopeful than she felt. "Oh, I shouldn't do that just yet. Mr. Merton thinks we may be able to do something."

"I know. But he has seen Demetrius too."

Mary did not confess the full extent of her faith in Clive Merton's power to achieve something. One's own sentimental feelings and passionate preferences are not received as proof of value by mere parents.

"But there is Lord Cramish and this letter, dad. We know that he isn't a fool."

"But was foolish enough to trust Cupolis!"

"None of us has much to boast of in that line, dad," she said with a wry smile; "but Lord Cramish wouldn't want to see us all if he hadn't something to say. I don't understand business, but surely there must be ways of starting a concern anew."

"If the process is valuable, my dear."

"Well, we can't say."

"No, but when the man who invented it is spoken of on all sides as partially demented, it makes a difference."

"Well, I'll tell you after the meeting to-morrow," she replied. "Mr. Merton is to call for me in his car. It seems we are to meet at Lord Cramish's house outside Stanmore."

Mary was making rather heavy weather of it just then. She had to fight her father's growing depression as well as her own, to keep the invalid cheerful when she was feeling in the depths herself. There is nothing so fatiguing and heart-wearying as the necessity for keeping up when you feel down.

Her feeling for Clive Merton was the only bright

spot in her existence just then. Her father, though not unkindly, would have laughed had she told him that she had fallen in love with a man she had met so lately. But she did not mind that, and she did not tell her father. She had seen a look in Clive's eyes that told her much, and she was happy in that, whatever might be in the outcome.

Clive Merton was trying to look cheerful when he called for her next day, and talked hopefully of the meeting as they drove.

"I think Cobham's a bit of an ass, and I doubt if he will ever disentangle the murder," he confided to her. "But that need not worry us. We have this company to restart, and then I hope it will only be a question of waiting a bit till we get results."

"You think so?"

He forced a smile. "Well, I have a proposition to make. I have made out a check to your father. I have it with me. It is not, of course, what he put into the old company, but we hope to start on more economical lines, and I think five thousand in the new company will equal that sum you lost in the old. You can pay me back when the dollars begin to flow in again."

Mary did not know that he was trying to negotiate the sale of his schooner yacht, and finding it not so easy to get his price, but tears came into her eyes as she looked at him gratefully.

"You are good, and we do appreciate it so much. But I can't borrow yet. I should hate to do that only to find that they were not going on with the company."

Clive bit his lip. He had hoped to get her to accept the loan definitely before the meeting, and now wished he had put this to her father before leaving the hotel.

He tried again and again, but she was adamant. In the end he had to give up. He was worried. In his heart of hearts he felt that Cramish had no good news for them.

Lord Cramish's large drawing-room had been selected for the meeting, and only Professor Logard was an absentee when Clive and Mary arrived.

When he had greeted them, Lord Cramish closed the door and came to the center of the room.

"I hope none of you came here to-day under the impression that the company is on the point of reconstruction," he began. "If any of you have that impression, I regret it. The fact is that I have seen Demetrius twice, and Mr. Merton has also interviewed him. The results of those interviews were unfortunate. We have both come to the conclusion that, if he ever had a valid and workable process, he is no longer in a state of mind to work, or even to explain it."

His guests looked angrily at each other. Cramish resumed. "But that in itself was not all. I have spent a little money on getting opinions, and they are all agreed that the process is nothing more than a scien-

tific phantasy. It served the purpose of the late Mr. Cupolis, but to us it has only proved a delusion and a snare, for which we have paid dearly."

"Is that all you can think of, Lord Cramish?" asked Colper with a faint sneer.

"If you can think of anything else, and are willing to spend some money, as I have done, I shall be willing to hear you!" the other snapped. "Otherwise you will please let me go on. I was about to say that, though I have perhaps lost more heavily than any of you, I cannot now advise any attempt at reconstruction. The process is useless, and beyond the half-finished factory and the land on which it stands, I think there are few, if any, assets available. How far the sale of the factory will go in paying the debts of the estate, I cannot say."

"But can we do nothing?" Mary cried.

Cramish looked rather sadly at her. "I simply advise you and all the others, Miss Glenne, to do as I am about to do. I am instructing my solicitors to put in a claim on the estate. There may be a composition. It may only be small. But at least it will be better than nothing. I am advised that there is a possible offer of twenty thousand pounds for the half-finished factory and ground. We may," he paused to smile bitterly, "possibly get a dividend of two shillings in the pound."

General dismay followed his announcement. Mary

was thunderstruck; Merton did his best to comfort her. The others crowded round Cramish and talked fourteen to the dozen.

"Then poor dad is ruined," said Mary to Clive in a piteous tone.

"Do let me help!" said he softly. "One never knows what will happen. May I suggest it to your father?"

She shook her head. "No. We must stand on our own feet."

Lord Cramish's voice was heard again. "It's no good talking. I have said my last word, gentlemen. The whole proposition is hopeless, but, unless the liquidator possesses some information which is not at my disposal, we must accept the situation. By the way, lunch will be served in half an hour. If any of you care to stay for it, you will be welcome."

Andrews, Smith and Major Brown stayed. Colper said good-by carelessly and stalked out like an ice-man. Merton excused himself on account of Mary's father, and Cramish bade farewell to them both in friendly fashion.

"Cheer up, Miss Glenne," he said. "We must hope that something will turn up."

When they were driving back to town, Merton was silent for a while, and looked uneasy. Mary was wrapped in her own miserable thoughts. She did not know how she was going to face her father. All her

hopes had gone. They must sell the house. The thought of her invalid father in rooms appalled her. He was not complaining, but when he had bad bouts in his illness he needed a great deal of both comfort and attention.

She heard Clive Merton's voice suddenly, low and rather uncertain.

"Mary, there is one way out. Don't laugh at me! I mean it. It will be the happiest of ways for me."

"Don't!" she cried, blushing vividly.

"But I must. When I saw you first I knew it would come to this with me. What does it matter if it comes now? Waiting won't make any difference to my feelings. I love you now. I wonder if you will—I mean to say, have I a chance? You see, there's your father. We could see that he was all right. I lost over this business, but I can still keep going fairly well."

"Please!" she said.

He bit his lip. "It isn't only that. It isn't pity because you two have taken such an ugly knock. Good heavens, Mary, do you think I would marry any one for pity! I meant to ask you when the corner was turned. There isn't any corner to turn now."

"I couldn't marry you now, Clive," she murmured.

"Why not?" he cried. "Let's be sensible, though I really don't feel a bit sensible, and this confounded car prevents me from showing you what I feel, darling."

"I couldn't!" she cried. "Not now! Not when we are like this. It wouldn't be fair to you."

"Then you would if all went right?" he said.

She colored up again. "What is the use of talking of it, Clive?"

"A great deal," he said.

The road at this point was deserted. He put on the brakes and took her in his arms, kissing her face and hair. But her face was cold, and she did not return his caress, though she made no attempt to restrain him. He stopped and sat back in his seat to regard her ruefully.

"Don't you love me at all, Mary?" he asked in an insistent whisper.

Suddenly she took up one of his hands and pressed it to her lips. "So much, Clive," she said.

He took her in his arms again, but she would not yield. Then a car came in sight and he released her and started his own car once more.

"Take notice that we are engaged!" he said. "I'm engaged to you at least, and all your fighting won't stop that."

She smiled sadly as she adjusted her hat. "Poor Clive! Poor me!" she said softly. "But it's no good, old boy."

Clive drove fast. "That's all you know! I'm going to get my affairs in order, dispose of some odd lumber that will bring in money, and then your father is going

to hear about it. At the present time I have the equivalent of forty thousand capital, if I include my boat. That's good enough for three, not to speak of two."

"I wouldn't marry any one for money, Clive."

"Nor would I, so this is my chance," he said. "You wouldn't marry any one for his money; you refuse to let me marry you because you have none! Will you tell me how poor folk ever get married?"

"They marry others as poor as themselves," said she.

"Then I am almost sorry Cupolis didn't trim me to an even greater extent," he retorted. "But never mind, I am one of those strong, talkative men who can get their way, if only by reason of much talking! You may struggle, my dear, but the wedding ring is only suspended over your head by a single hair, and I am going to cut that very soon."

Mary smiled. He was happier now. He had cheered her up, and he knew that, whatever she might say, her love for him was as great as his for her. He could wait.

"But what am I to say to father?" she demanded as they neared the hotel.

"I'll come in with you, if I may, and we'll be as untruthful as we can about the possibilities of a composition," he observed. "Leave it to me. I am a splendid liar when I start. I don't see why we should not suggest the likelihood of ten shillings in the pound."

"Lord Cramish said two."

"He is a man with no imagination. He admitted that the liquidator might have control of assets of which he himself knew nothing. Come along!"

And Mary Glenne suffered herself to be persuaded.

Chapter XXII

AVOIRDUPOIS

WHEN Cobham returned to Hindon, he had a long conference with the chief constable.

The latter was growing pessimistic. The local inquiries had failed. The local round-up had only produced the usual crop of alibis, but not a single, fleeting criminal or potential criminal upon whom they could father the crime had been seen in the county. Nor had the police found the grapnel rope.

He was not aware that his superintendent had never fully spoken his mind to him. Both of them had a scorn for the amateur detective with his theories and his officious attempts to interfere with routine procedure, but Shardel was not aware that, in Cobham's eyes, he himself was nothing more than an amateur!

But that was how Cobham looked at him, knowing him to be an intelligent organizer, but never forgetting that he was a retired soldier, untrained in the art and science of detection. There was also the fact that Shardel had shared the glory in a former case, though Cobham had done all the thinking himself, only to find his views echoed by his superior, until the latter became convinced that he had himself produced the sound and Cobham the echo. These things rankle!

"Look here, Cobham," said the chief constable, as he sucked viciously at a very foul pipe, "this evidence from Scotland Yard does put a kink in our line, whatever you think of it."

"It seems to, sir."

"Damn it! It does! I think we were too ready to put the suicide theory to one side. If this grapnel was Cupolis's, it wasn't brought by the murderer. If not, then suicide is the verdict."

"But if that is all we have to look at, sir, even if he could get up and down from his window, how could Cupolis get rid of the grapnel after death?"

Shardel grinned. "All right, have it your own tin-pot way. I see that. The whole case is full of traps. But I will say, in spite of all the police surgeons, that a wound might be inflicted by that dagger without leaving any tissue on the blade. A fragment of tissue is a slight thing to hang a case on, Cobham."

Cobham smiled. "I admit it, sir. But men have escaped by the skin of their teeth before now, they say, and we may hang one the same way. For example, every hypothesis in this case must be an adventurous one. Let us take it that Cupolis did buy that grapnel."

"You can't get away from it!"

"No. Well, shall we say it is possible he meant to escape from his window that night when the guests were abed and hung the grapnel out with the rope on it to descend by?"

"When he was doped?"

"Or shamming to be worse than he was. But suppose he dozed off after doing that, and a fellow who wanted to kill him climbed up, did the job, and cleared off."

Shardel got a horrible "drink" from his foul pipe and swore violently. "You ought to write detective stories, Cobham," he said sarcastically, taking out the pipe and beginning to unscrew it.

"I was merely trying to explain, sir, that things could be explained in various ingenious ways. Now, lately, I wondered if certain finger-prints I found were not those of Mr. Merton."

"And were they?"

"No, sir. I got his finger-prints from a book he had been reading, but they did not correspond."

"Why should they? He was one of those least likely to have done it."

"We can't say that, sir, in a case where murder was done for revenge and not money. I don't know why it should be so, but Merton looked more vicious about the crash than most of them, except Corbett."

Shardel got his pipe going again. "Then this oil. Why the dickens should any one put oil on a grapnel? You don't want a grapnel to slip when you are hanging from it."

"Well, you see, sir, Cupolis bought it a good while ago. He may have wanted to keep it from rust."

"Right. We have still these footprints. We can't

place them. Cupolis did not take that size in boots. He was not wearing boots in bed! His boots were found quite clean, though it was wet below. If he had got down on to the flower-bed by a rope, which seems silly in itself, we should have found the marks of bare feet there. The whole thing is a damned muddle, my dear fellow, but the idea of this Scotland Yard man you saw gives us a chance to get out with credit before we become the butt of the press."

"In what way, sir?" asked Cobham rather sourly.

"Let it be suicide. Let the reporters know Scotland Yard thinks it is, see? I think it is myself, and if you will give up that bally 'fragment of tissue' idea, you'll see it too."

"There was the verdict at the inquest, sir."

"Tosh! The name and weight of Scotland Yard will carry us. We found only one weapon, that came from inside; we find that the grapnel on which we trusted was bought by Cupolis. I think this is where we get off."

"There is your amateur!" Cobham said to himself disgustedly. "Those London chaps will carry on a case quietly for months after the public have forgotten about it, but this chap, being a soldier, expects to carry everything in the first assault."

"Do you really mean that, sir?" he asked aloud.

"Well, I am thinking of it. Unless you can bring me some real evidence soon I think it is up to us to consider more carefully the facts in favor of the

suicide theory. Cupolis comes home, you know, tells these poor devils by letter that he has busted them all sky-high and then goes to his room and tries to purge his offense, don't you know, by the summary way."

Cobham's jaw dropped. If this was really going to happen, the ground was cut from under his feet. Wild thoughts of resigning crossed his mind and were gone.

"I suppose I can have another week, sir," he said stiffly.

Captain Shardel stared, then laughed. "Take a fortnight, my dear fellow, but for the love of Mike, don't let us down! We got off with such a beautiful run I thought it was Cobham first and the rest nowhere."

Cobham saluted and left him. He took a car down to Tendon Oaks and again sought the bedroom which had once been Clive Merton's.

When he emerged again, he was carrying the chair he had formerly marked under the seat with a small cross. It was concealed in sacking and the police driver looked at it with interest.

"Thing I had to borrow for a bit," said the superintendent casually. "Just drop me at home, will you? I want to store this there till I have time to look at it properly. And you might go back by way of Shrunton, to look as if we came from there."

The driver was intrigued, but dare not show it. "Very well, sir. I'll do that."

It may have been a coincidence that Cobham's wife

was out when the car arrived at his home. At all events she was out, and her husband promptly smuggled the chair into a kind of loft behind the house where he did a little carpentry in his spare time. He was rather an adept at making cupboards, book-cases and other oddments, as well as more prosaic things.

Captain Shardel had certainly changed his views. He had not liked to hurt the superintendent's feelings by saying that the discovery of the identity of the man who bought the grapnel, to his mind, proved that the dead financier had committed suicide. He had tried to soften the blow by making it merely appear that this would be a good way of gracefully withdrawing from a case which promised no good result.

But personally he did believe now that suicide should have been the proper verdict. Naturally, with the information at their disposal, the coroner's jury could not bring in that finding, and it was a question if that could be reversed now or the inquest reopened. He was also sorry that Scotland Yard had really been instrumental in bringing this new evidence forward, and he feared the press would twit him with having failed to call in Scotland Yard before.

"The fact is, my dear," he said to his wife when he got home, "poor old Cobham has done a lot of work and done it well. He will take it very hard if we abandon this case. But then I'm chagrined myself. I thought we were going to do something spectacular, and now I know we aren't."

His wife looked puzzled. "But they gave that other verdict. I don't see how you can get that out of the way, or how you can get round it."

He smiled ruefully. "Fortunately the verdicts of coroners' juries are not infallible. The best way will be to try to get round it, and I have the idea of a scheme for that."

"But are you sure it was suicide? How can you be sure?"

He shrugged. "You can check the grounds I have for believing so now. In the first place Cobham's reliance on this grapnel as evidence means, if it means anything, that he thinks the man was killed by an outsider who shinned up a rope attached to the grapnel. But if the grapnel was bought by Cupolis months before, the visitor could not have brought it. If no one brought the grapnel, then the presumption is there was no outsider concerned, for we only inferred the outsider from the finding of the grapnel itself."

His wife laughed. "I like Mr. Cobham. I wish it could be done in some way not to hurt him."

"My dear, I am the last man to hurt old Cobham. I like the blighter immensely. If this hadn't been one of the most complex cases I am sure he would have made something of it. After all he did make something, though he doesn't like to admit it, for this new clew might never have come up if he hadn't visited Scotland Yard."

"Well, how are you going to get round the verdict at the inquest?"

He pondered for a moment. "The ever-blessed press! I haven't much use for them as a rule when they try to interfere in our affairs, but here they are really welcome. I have had to fob them off so far with words and fair promises, but I don't see why I shouldn't pick out a prominent pressman (or seem to let him pick me out) and then talk very ingenuously about the case. He will be delighted to catch me in an unguarded moment, and I shall be pleased to let him think he is doing it."

"Why, you are getting quite subtle, Bob!"

He grinned. "Subtlety has always been my strong suit. But a wife never knows her husband's strong points."

"Though she can't avoid seeing his weak ones," she laughed. "But Cobham may be right after all. If there is a chance—"

He nodded and began to reflect. "Wait a moment! I can work it another way. If there is any possibility of Cobham being right, and cases do take queer turns sometimes, I might just mention the clew involved in finding that Cupolis himself bought that grapnel, and add that, but for Cobham's cleverness and acumen, we might never have heard that."

"I don't see the subtlety of your new scheme yet," she jibed.

"Ah, I am coming to the clever bit, the place where

Machiavelli is made to look like a mere child. Instead of saying more, I shall allow the pressman to draw his own inferences. Most of them are smart enough to do that. He will see that the point suggests suicide and expand it for the benefit of his readers. If all our efforts fizzle out, we shall have saved some of our prestige by providing the press with the suicide clew. We shall not get ourselves into trouble by suggesting it, but, once the papers suggest it, we shall be bound to investigate *their* theory. After all, we cannot make ourselves responsible for the verdict of a coroner's jury, and an open one at that."

She smiled.

"I know newspaper readers will kick up a row if you don't listen to the advice of their pet papers."

"Quite so. I shall have done nothing but mention a clew we have found. I am entitled to do that. If we find nothing, it will be said that we did pretty well; if, on the other hand, Cobham carries on on his own account, and wants the murderer—"

"But you say there wasn't a murderer."

Shardel frowned. Wives were very dense sometimes. "My dear girl, I mean if Cobham does make a hit, and there is a murderer, the newspaper suicide theory will put that murderer off his guard—a very important thing sometimes. It will be thought that Cobham is turning his thoughts and brains to the suicide theory."

"You mean you will let some one else investigate

that side, while Cobham, if he wishes, can carry on with his own theory?"

"That's it. I don't believe in it. I feel sure it was suicide; a sort of expiation on Cupolis's part. But I should look three sorts of fool if Cobham was right and I had sworn he wasn't. As we all know, there is nothing sure in this world but death and taxes."

She nodded. "I think that is much wiser than your first scheme. You might get rapped over the knuckles for that. But this idea doesn't hurt Cobham, who has worked so hard, and it does give you a chance to appear wise in any event."

"Which is the thing most people spend their lives striving for," he laughed. "We'll flatter the press and put them in a good temper by letting them have this titbit instead of keeping it to ourselves. Even a surly dog remembers that you did feed him sometimes!"

That was eventually what happened. Shardel communicated to the press the fact that Cupolis had been discovered as the buyer of the grapnel found in the pond, but firmly refused to speculate on the significance of the clew.

The pressmen, however, did speculate, and jointly decided that the clew eliminated a burglar or revengeful investor coming from outside, and clearly suggested, in conjunction with the facts already known, that Cupolis had taken his own life with the poniard found in the room at Tendon Oaks.

"The possibility of suicide, to be inferred from this

clew, does not appear to have been sufficiently considered by the police," said one newspaper next day. "If they take our advice, they will investigate it thoroughly, and not rest until they have either proved or disproved the suicide theory so cleverly deduced from this fresh piece of evidence by our special correspondent."

Chapter XXIII

A JOURNALISTIC SNOWBALL

THE suicide theory, which was apparently deduced very cleverly from the new clew by at least seven special correspondents, was eagerly debated by the readers of seven newspapers. These millions of men and women in the street declared to each other in tram and train, at home and abroad, that the Hindon police would be criminally negligent if they did not at once give their serious attention to tin-tacks and leave severely alone all those other nebulous theories which had led and would lead to nothing.

The newspapers themselves, having been given a tit-bit they had not expected, returned the compliment by stating that Superintendent Cobham, while reticent about the matter, must have had the suicide theory in his mind when he made those investigations that ended in tracing Cupolis as the purchaser of the grapnel. He had professed himself not at liberty to discuss the matter and had refused to be drawn into expressing any opinion for or against, but it was pretty certain that this intelligent and painstaking officer was on the right line and would in due course confirm the views formed by the seven special correspondents.

They ended by giving their readers to believe, wholly without warrant, that the Hindon police were dropping the hunt for an hypothetical murderer, and about to concentrate solely upon the job of proving Cupolis guilty of *felo de se.*

"Now I think I was responsible for the better scheme," said Mrs. Shardel, when she had studied her newspaper. "Until I butted in with my feminine intuition—"

"You mean your density?"

"And saw," she continued with dignity, "that you were running right off the rails, you were in danger of making a holy muddle of the thing."

"Wives are privileged," said Shardel sadly. "Have it your own way! At any rate, we save face both ways. Cobham is duly buttered up, honor is satisfied and, instead of being slanged for being inefficient and provincial, we get a bouquet slung at our heads. *Fiat Justicia!*"

"Or Cobham gets one at his head, which is juster, my dear. How does he take it?"

He shrugged. "Even the best butter does not altogether reconcile him to my mentioning that clew. But he does admit that it will put the 'murderer' (his own invention) off his guard, and that we can say we are devoting special attention to the press theory while he is actually carrying on with the old love."

"Then you are not abandoning the hunt?"

"We are not, until in the natural effusion of time, it fizzles out and the verdict is forgotten. I have given Cobham a free hand to go where he likes and do what he likes for the next week."

"What did I say?" asked Clive Merton, as he sat in the drawing-room of the Glenne's house in Somerset. "I said that man was a bit of a gasbag. So he is! He really worked up a lot of confusing details till he convinced himself that he was a sort of condensed and sublimated Scotland Yard. And now it looks like suicide, not murder!"

He had come back with the Glennes from town. Mary had not weakened in her resolution, but her father had had a shock and was very glad to accept Clive's offer to go down with them and help to disentangle his now much entangled affairs. Glenne still refused to accept any pecuniary help, but Mary knew nothing of business and, as her father had taken to his bed on reaching home, Clive was able to be useful to them both.

Mary listened thoughtfully to Clive's comments. "But may it not be right?" she asked.

He nodded. "Of course it may. I am not quarrelling with the possibility that it was suicide. I merely say it was silly of Cobham to make such a mystery, torture the case into all kinds of absurdities, and then fade out like this."

"But wasn't it Captain Shardel, the chief constable, who gave the clew to the press?"

Clive lighted a cigarette, smiling. "Naturally. But you know a superior always has to take the responsibility for his subordinates. Shardel is in charge of operations, and I think it was jolly decent of him to give Cobham all the credit."

"I suppose it was," said Mary. "But, oh, dear! there isn't any hope of getting our money back. I hoped all the time that it might be found. That horrible man must have just thrown it away with both hands."

Then she burst into tears and Clive had the long if pleasant duty of comforting her.

Superintendent Cobham, on the other hand, was not at all grateful to the chief constable for giving him butter by proxy.

"That's all I get for my pains," he said bitterly to his wife. "Shardel is an amateur, whatever he thinks himself, and he's more keen on his prestige than he is on my success. Thank heaven, I have a free hand for at least a week, and I intend to use it for all I am worth. Would you like to have a run up to town with me, my dear?"

She gasped at this joyful irrelevancy. "To London?"

"And, perhaps, to the seaside afterwards," he said. "I shall be busy, of course, but you look as if you could

do with a holiday; so you can have one, if you care for it. The journalists are sure to argue that I am off for a holiday, too, as I am taking you with me."

She was glad of a holiday on any terms and gleefully assented.

They started off for London next day. On arrival there, he left her at the little Bloomsbury hotel and went off to have an interview with Vance Mand. Cupolis might have lost the investors' money at play, but he was not accepting that as the whole truth just yet.

Mand was now Sir Hiram Goage's secretary, and the baronet, who had made his money in tin-tacks, lived in Grosvenor Square.

Sir Hiram had many friends, myriads of acquaintances, and thousands of hangers-on, who bowed down before the living image of the Crœsus. So Mand found ample scope for his energies in dealing with the immense social correspondence, the invitations to dances, At Homes, and entertainments attended by these mobs, not to speak of the charitable appeals that mountainous at Tendon Oaks, formed whole ranges at Grosvenor Square.

When a man-servant had let Cobham into the house and a second had gone to see if Mand was at liberty, Cobham was shown into a huge library. Here Mand sat at a table, snowed under with letters, bills, programs, and other oddments thrown up by the whirl

pool of society. He rose, smiled welcome, and asked Cobham to sit down.

"I don't agree with the newspapers' suicide theory," he said, when they had chatted for a few minutes, "but I suppose your chief had to give out the clew and the press invented the rest. Cupolis never showed me the grapnel, but I believe he must have had it in an outhouse, from which the murderer stole it."

Cobham nodded. "It's nice to find some one who agrees with me, sir. But I really came to ask you a question about this alleged gambling. Mrs. Hassen, as you no doubt have seen in the papers, says she saw Cupolis losing money fast at Monte Carlo." He produced a written note and passed it over. "These are the dates. I understood from you he was at Mentone some months ago. But Mentone is one place and Monte another. I'll be glad if you can tell me if he was there between the dates I have marked here?"

Mand stared at the paper and reflected. "I can't say offhand. I think not. But if you will wait a moment I will go upstairs and get a notebook I kept."

Cobham assenting, Mand went off and returned in a few minutes. "That's odd," he said. "Cupolis was not in Mentone at that time, but he was certainly not at home. He went away for a fortnight and asked that his correspondence should not be forwarded."

Cobham started. "Really, sir. Did he say where he was?"

Mand nodded. "He said, I think, that he was going yachting with some fellow—nothing more definite than that."

Cobham smiled. "Might it not be that he went over to Mentone, all the same, though he did not tell you? It is quite possible he did not want people to know where he was."

Mand stared. "Perhaps you are right. I wondered if you were going to say he went yachting with Mr. Merton."

"Ah," said Cobham, starting again. "I'll keep that idea in mind, sir. I never thought of that."

Mand had quite enough to do, so Cobham did not encroach on his time any further, but went home, after paying a private call on a man in an office at Southampton Row.

When he had heard of the chief constable's interview and decision, he had returned the borrowed chair to Merton's room at Tendon Oaks.

"Mand said, or thought, it might be Merton's yacht he went on," he mused as he got out of the train at Hindon. "I don't think that much of a shot after all."

He returned to his wife, told her to put on her things, and surprised her vastly by taking her to the offices of a well-known tourist agency.

"I have a little surprise for you, my dear," he said to her as they entered the tourist office. "We're on our own now, and you have never been abroad. So I

propose to take a little trip to the Riviera and spend a few days there."

She opened her eyes. "Where?"

"At Mentone, my dear."

"But won't that be very expensive?" she objected.

"It will be worth it," said her husband. "This is where we get our tickets."

Chapter XXIV

ON THE TRACK OF THE PRODIGAL GREEK

THERE was one thing peculiarly British about Superintendent Cobham, and that was his tenacity. He hated to give up what he had once begun, and from that quality arose this busman's holiday to the Riviera.

But his errand there, which he did not explain fully to his wife, was something more concrete than usual, and when he reached Monte Carlo, and took rooms for both of them in a quiet hotel, he lost no time in setting to work.

Mrs. Hassen had seen a Greek, who might or might not be the late Mr. Cupolis, losing small fortunes nightly at roulette and rouge et noire. The question of identity had not worried Cobham much at first. But, now that the suicide theory had come to the front again, and Captain Shardel had warmly espoused it as a means of shelving a case he thought insoluble, it became Cobham's duty to settle the question once for all. Mrs. Cobham was rather surprised to find that the place was not so crowded with fashionable people as she had imagined it would be.

"It's very pretty, I know, dear," she said. "But I

think I would sooner have gone to that place we usually go to at home."

He nodded. "You see, this isn't the season. The English come here in the winter for a warmer climate, but now, in June, it's too hot for most of them, and I believe foreigners give it a turn. Anyway, we needn't stay long if we don't like."

Here was a luxuriant and a prodigal husband whom she had never known before! Mrs. Cobham smiled. She was afraid it would cost a lot of money, but it would be rather nice when she got home to tell her friends she and her husband had just "run over" to the "Riveera" for a few days and meant to go to the usual seaside later on when Cobham had his holidays.

Fortunately, in this off-season, and at this quiet hotel, she found one or two middle-aged Englishwomen of a friendly sort, and with them she criticized the odd ways of the natives to her heart's content, while the superintendent visited the local police headquarters and absorbed useful information with the avidity of a good sponge.

He was delighted to find that his foreign confrère could speak excellent English. His own French was rather short of regular as well as irregular verbs.

From this obliging official he learned the ways of the rooms and ascertained how to get into them. He also heard that the croupiers were likely to know something of a man who had lost large sums at the tables over a long period.

"They might identify a photograph," he suggested.

His confrère said that it was most probable. In fact, he did better. He interested himself in the case and promised to accompany Cobham to the rooms and assist him with his inquiries.

Cobham accepted the offer with great pleasure.

"But I don't want it to come out that I am here," he added.

The other laughed. "I shall observe my utmost discretion, monsieur," he observed, "but I understand; yes, absolutely. Those of the case think you are away. They do not know you inquire. But you return and make your leap, hein?"

"If I can find some one to leap on, yes," laughed Cobham. "My point is this: a Greek called Cupolis, living in England, embezzled a lot of money. We do not know where it is at first. Then an English lady comes to me and tells me she has seen a Greek losing a great deal of money at the tables some months ago. She thinks he was like the photograph of Mr. Cupolis."

"But she is not positive, eh?"

"No. That is my trouble. I suppose you get a good many Greeks here from time to time?"

"Hundreds, monsieur. We have of all the races who wish to leave their money with us. They are often successful, I promise you!"

Cobham made an appointment for that night and went back to his hotel. As he entered, Mrs. Cobham was relating to her new acquaintances an episode of her

girlhood, into which entered a palmist, a dark man, and a fair woman. She was not at all displeased to hear that her husband was going to see the rooms after dinner. One of her new friends could tell fortunes by cards, by numbers, and the other had a crystal hidden somewhere upstairs. They were to have a séance later, and the fortune-telling which is dear to the hearts of so many women; even if they only manage to hit one coincidence out of a thousand prophecies.

"But do be careful of pickpockets, my dear," she adjured her huband. "They say quite a lot of thieves come out here."

The superintendent grinned. "I'll look out," he replied.

After dinner he went off to keep his appointment. It was late when he came back, and Mrs. Cobham had already been promised a fortune, a sea voyage, and an encounter with a tall, fair man, who would try to wreck her life. She had also been told that she would meet with trouble from a small, dark man, suffer some pecuniary losses, and go to live in the country. These were the fortunes told by numbers and by the cards respectively. The lady who used the crystal had seen Mrs. Cobham in it, dressed in a white veil, with a wreath of orange blossoms. That rather upset her. It suggested that she was going to marry again and lose Cobham, to whom she was much attached.

But the arrival of her husband, looking very fit and very cheerful, put these forebodings out of her

mind, and when they had retired to their room she asked him if he had thought the gambling very wicked and had he won a lot of money.

Cobham smiled as he took off his dinner-jacket. "I didn't see much of that," he told her. "The fact is, my dear, I have made a discovery."

"Is it one of these systems to win at the tables?" she asked brightly.

He shook his head. "No, my dear, I ought to have told you that I am not at all satisfied with Captain Shardel's ideas. I couldn't sit down under it. I felt he was wrong, and I feel it still."

She smiled. "Oh, it's that old case of yours again."

"Quite right. It is. Shardel says it must be suicide after all, because Cupolis lost his money out here."

"Well, that lady said so."

"She said she thought it was Cupolis. Well, it wasn't! I knew it wasn't. That is really why I came out here and, if you want to get home again, well, we can go when you like, see?"

Mrs. Cobham did see. She liked the hotel well enough, but it was not like home, or even like the rooms to which they always went on their yearly holiday. In addition to that, the lady she had just met was a determined crystal gazer, and Mrs. Cobham was sure she would "see" her next in widow's weeds.

"Just as you like, my dear," she said obligingly; "but what is it you have found?"

He took off his waistcoat and sat on the edge of the

bed, beaming. "Well, just that it wasn't Cupolis at all. I saw one of the police, a nice chap, and he took me to the Casino. I had a talk with a croupier and another with an official. I showed them Cupolis's photo and asked them point-blank if he was the fellow who lost the money some months back."

"And what did they say?"

"That they did not know him. You see, they can tell one kind of Greek face from another, which is more than the lady who gave the information was able to do. They remembered a plunger who came here round about February and lost thousands at roulette and rouge et noire."

Mrs. Cobham had a good deal of common sense. "Yes, dear, but could they be sure? They must see thousands of people gambling, and a great many losing heavily. Then it is some months ago. Could they be sure, absolutely sure?"

He patted her shoulder. "In this case they could, and I'll tell you why. When he was losing money they thought he was called Vupoulis—'poulis' not 'upolis'—and they got to know him because he came so often, and never won. But they might have forgotten him only for one fact. When he had lost all his money, he fell in with a rich widow, who used to watch him play, and took a fancy to him, and he married her."

"How romantic!" cried Mrs. Cobham. "But he wouldn't be the kind of husband I would marry."

"I hope I'll content you for a while," said Cobham, laughing. "But I was going to tell you about that. They told me the new wife didn't mind him playing, but she used to dole him out just twenty louis a night, and from that time on he never lost. He won a certain amount at each sitting and then his wife used to drag him off home."

"She had a bit of sense anyway," commented his wife.

"You bet she had. But this is the point. He got quite well known to every one, his name is Axopoulis, and he is known as 'The Man of Twenty Louis.'"

"Then where does Mr. Cupolis come in?"

"He doesn't come in at all, my dear. Mr. Cupolis, they say here (or his photograph), wasn't very much like the other man, except they both had dark hair, dark eyes and hooky noses."

Mrs. Cobham nodded as intelligently as she could. "Well, what does it mean exactly?"

"Mean to us? Well, just that I'm ready to be off home to-morrow if you are, my dear. My idea was this. Now I have settled this point I have to get to work again. Of course, I'll have my holiday later on—"

"This is a holiday for me."

"Of a kind, my dear. But here I am dragging you away again. My proposal is that you should come back with me, and I'll send you to stay a week with your sister Annabel in London. And you can have a good

time, and see the theaters, and so on. Later on, when I've done, we'll take our real holiday and go to the seaside as usual."

She looked perplexed. "But I'd like you with me."

"Later, my dear," said he, "when you're in town I think you ought to get a winter coat. They say they make those rabbit furs all colors now, very smart, and not too dear. Your sister'll be glad to help you choose one, I'm sure."

This was diplomacy, though perhaps not of a very high order. But it was effective, as he meant it should be, and Mrs. Cobham returned very cheerfully to London next day to stay with her sister and make an exciting tour of the fur shops.

The superintendent vanished temporarily from her ken. He was supposed to be going back to Hindon. Actually he went no farther than the office in Southampton Row, where he had formerly had an interview with an old friend.

This old friend was a retired police-inspector turned inquiry agent. He received Cobham now with the greatest warmth and they were closeted together for an hour, talking vigorously the whole time.

"Now, old chap," said the inquiry agent, as Cobham rose to go, "what you want to do is to have a little golf." Here he winked broadly. "Histable is the spot. Don't forget that! And the Histable Common Golf Club is the institution."

"I'll remember, Jimmy," said Cobham, wringing his

hand. "I think you have done me a jolly good turn. But what's the damage? I don't want you to spend your time for nothing."

"None to you, old man," said the other. "Get along with you before you hurt my feelings! If I ever get drunk in Hindon you can bail me out, see?"

Chapter XXV

CLIVE MERTON GOES TO TOWN

THE news that the chief constable at Hindon was investigating the suicide theory in the Cupolis case was a crushing blow to the Glennes. Combined with the opinion of those best qualified to know that the dead man's estate would not pay more than a shilling in the pound, if that, it meant that they would have to sell up at once to find a smaller place, or go into rooms, and at the best, to cut down expenses to a minimum.

Clive Merton had stayed on at the house for a week. When Colonel Glenne had finally decided to put the house on the market, Clive had seen some local people and endeavored to effect a sale. But no one down there was willing to pay what the owner demanded, and at the end of the week Clive observed that he was going to London, and would place the property in the hands of some agents there. He was certain that a better price would be obtained by them than by the local agents.

Colonel Glenne agreed gratefully. Mary still withheld her official confirmation of the engagement Clive had announced to her, but the last few days had been happy ones for Clive. He knew that he had been of

use to her and her father, and he believed that he could bring Mary round to his own point of view.

He was still negotiating the sale of his schooner yacht, but there, too, the prices offered up to date were inadequate, and he had not closed with any of them.

"I don't know what we should have done if you had not been here," said Mary Glenne, as she saw him off at the station.

He smiled at her. "Well, you know, you seem prepared to do without me, don't you?"

"That is unkind," she replied, blushing and laughing. "You know it isn't that at all, Clive. If things had been otherwise—"

As she paused, he laughed again. "Oh, don't worry! I am coming back, and I shall keep on coming back till I get the right answer. You wouldn't have me a coward, would you?"

Then the train came in and cut their conversation short.

When he arrived in town, Clive visited four prominent agents in turn and had Colonel Glenne's property entered on their books for negotiation. He was glad to find that they did not quarrel with the colonel's price, but hoped to do something on that basis within the month.

When he had emerged from the offices of the last agent, he turned to his club, and was walking slowly down Piccadilly when he caught sight of a burly figure

outside a boot shop. He stared, stopped, then noticed that the burly man was regarding him anxiously. That is to say, he was staring at Clive's reflection in the plate-glass window without turning round.

Clive touched him on the shoulder. "Hallo, superintendent!" he said, smiling. "Still on the job, I see!"

Cobham was, perhaps, not very anxious to see him, but the damage was done, and he replied amiably to the greeting.

"Yes, sir. I am. And how are you?"

"As well as can be expected after the crash," said Clive. "Going to renew your footgear, eh?"

Cobham shook his head. "No, sir. I was just looking at those metal boot-trees. I haven't seen that kind for many years."

Clive looked. "Petty solid, aren't they? Weigh about three pounds apiece, I should say. What are they for?"

Cobham looked at him shrewdly. "I should say, sir, they were to put boots on when you wanted to hammer in a nail in the sole, or that kind of thing. Of course they have to be smaller than the boot they go into. They are quite a good deal shorter and narrower than the sole and heel of the boot."

Clive grinned. "That is what our old friend Punch calls 'another glimpse of the obvious,' Cobham! I see the point, but I don't see what interest these things have for you."

"They have an interest for you, too, and some others, sir, or may have," replied Cobham, with a twinkle in his eye.

Clive checked a smile and wrinkled up his brows. "One of the papers seemed to think you were on holiday?"

Cobham grinned. "I had my wife with me, sir."

This was a new and more friendly superintendent. Clive nodded, reflected for a moment, then observed: "A busman's holiday? I see. And these things have given you an idea, is that it?"

Cobham began to hum, broke off, and agreed. "You hit it, sir. I was just thinking that things like those could make a nice small footprint in wet soil."

Clive started. "That's jolly smart of you. But surely you have given up the murder theory? All the papers said so, and there was that clew from the chief constable."

"Don't let it go any further," said Cobham. "Have you been down with Miss Glenne's people till lately, sir?"

"I came up to-day. They have to sell their house."

"That's bad," said the superintendent thoughtfully. "Now look here, sir. I am sorry for that young lady especially, but I am going to tell you something that may cheer her up a bit. It's my own secret so far, and I wouldn't tell you, only I know you have stood their friend."

"Then you don't suspect me any longer?" said Clive, interested and a trifle excited.

"I never did, sir. But this is to be kept dark and, as it may not come off, perhaps it would be better to say nothing about it to the young lady till I know one way or the other."

"This is jolly decent of you, superintendent," cried Clive warmly, "but we can't stand talking about it in the street. I was just going along to my club for some tea. Will you come?"

Cobham was very willing, and they went to the club and sat down to tea before they returned to the subject.

"Now," said Clive, when he saw Cobham had everything he wanted, "you have made me very curious to hear the latest. Did you really mean to hint that you might get some of the investors' money back for them? I thought old Cupolis had blued it all at Monte."

Cobham sipped his tea. "Well, he hadn't, sir; not at all. I was over there a short while ago, and it was another Greek, a chap called Axopoulis."

"Then he had the cash and was going to make a bolt?"

"As far as I can see, it looks like it, sir. But it's all a chance, and that it why I am trying to do it *sub rosa*, so to speak. If I have made a mistake, I don't want all the country to know about it."

"But how are you going to find where he hid the money?"

Cobham scratched his chin thoughtfully. "Now, sir,

you are asking something. At present I am looking for a man who plays golf, and when I find him I may find the loot."

"Bravo!" said Clive. "That is the stuff to give us. I don't know how you worked it out when the other chaps gave up, but I am not going to try to pump you when you have been good enough to tell me so much. If it comes off, it will be tremendous news for the Glennes."

Cobham nodded. Evidently he had taken a fancy to Clive.

"You know, sir, that an officer of the police has the right when necessary to call any one to his assistance."

"Absolutely. You can count me in any time if you want help."

Cobham studied his athletic figure with appreciation. "You could do your bit in a rough and tumble, no doubt, sir."

Clive grinned. "Any kind of old scrap suits me. I am not Gene Tunney, you know, but I have a small punch in both hands when needed."

Cobham passed his cup and took the cigarette Clive offered him. "Do you play golf, sir?"

"Scratch," replied Clive.

"That must mean something pretty good, sir, I suppose."

"Fair. Are you taking it up?"

Cobham twinkled again. "I think I ought to have a hobby for my old age, sir, and golf will be as good as

any. Can you tell me if one can join a club near London easily?"

Clive shook his head. "You would find it rather expensive, what with the entrance fee and annual subscription. In any case, you wouldn't be here long enough to get value out of it. But, you know, there are courses where you can get day tickets and hire clubs. Do you really want to play?"

"I want to try to play, sir."

Clive reflected. If it was true that the superintendent was on the track of the missing funds, his own business in town was not so urgent. Cobham had been surprisingly frank. He had given Clive new heart. Why not show the fellow the ropes a bit?

"I say," he began, smiling, "trying to learn golf by yourself is a bit of a blue egg. Why not let me take you out and give you a few tips? I belong to a couple of clubs."

"That's very good of you, sir."

"Good be hanged! I'd like it. And you wouldn't need to hire clubs. I have oodles of 'em, though I shall have to cut down that sort of thing now. We'll have a round to-morrow."

"I should like it very much," said Cobham.

"Right. Are you doing anything to-night? If not, I have a couple of seats for a show, and it will be company for me."

Cobham accepted the offer with alacrity: "I wonder, sir, if you know a golf course at Histable?"

Clive nodded. "Played on it once with a pal of mine who lives at Histable village. It is a course laid out on the common, so that there is a right of way over it. But there is a club-house. Any outsider can play by paying a fee."

Cobham looked down. "I have a fancy to learn there, sir. If it isn't one of the fancy clubs I shan't have any cracks smiling at my swipes."

"I know what you mean. I felt that once. Rabbits are nervous, and I was an awful rabbit at first.—I'm not much of a plutocrat since the smash, but I still have my car and we'll drive down to Histable to-morrow for a couple of rounds. We can lunch at the club-house."

Cobham smiled. "I've never been in a golf club-house, curiously enough, sir. Football was my game when I was younger," he observed. "I suppose you have a caterer, and that sort of thing?"

"Oh, yes. It's simple enough though. You can feed there, or have a drink, and there are baths for members, and a room or two to put up in."

"Ah, I wondered where they put their things," said Cobham casually.

Clive was amused at the novice's interest. "Oh, the rooms are bedrooms. All the members have lockers for their things. However, you'll see it all to-morrow. I'll 'phone my pal to-night and he'll make us all right.—Where do you stay?"

Cobham mentioned a small hotel in Bloomsbury. Clive made a note of it.

"Right. I'll call for you at half-past nine to-morrow. We will find the links clearer early in the day."

They adjourned to the smokeroom then, and Clive tried to get back to the more interesting topic.

"I wonder why Captain Shardel accepted that suicide theory," he began. "Do you suppose it was suicide?"

Cobham shrugged. "Cupolis could have done it himself, if he had used that dagger."

"If he had?"

"Yes, sir."

"I believe you think the old professor brought it, when he was not responsible for himself. I suppose he could have got it from the trophy and smuggled it upstairs?"

Cobham thought for a moment, and then expressed his agreement. "That is one of the funny features of the case and I am not sure if we shall ever clear it up, even if we are on the mark in other ways. You see, the old man was certainly suffering from a mental—"

"Aberration?"

"Yes, that is the word. He couldn't tell us if he had had that dagger—not definitely anyway. What he did in the night he can't remember, and we can only guess at. It is possible he meant in a mad fit to do in Cupolis, and smuggled the dagger to his room. It's possible he climbed out on the ledge and got in by the window,

saw Cupolis dead, dropped the dagger, and climbed back. He was wet enough to have done that, you all said."

"But you don't think he did the actual deed?"

"I am sure he didn't. However important that dagger looks, it seems to me to have no real bearing on the murder. Some one dropped it in the room, but it wasn't used to kill Cupolis."

Clive nodded. "I see. Since you put it that way, and taking it for granted that it was not suicide, the only theory I can see is that a man climbed up a rope attached to that grapnel, did him in and got away. That was your idea, I know.—Is it not possible the murderer got away with the swag?"

Cobham nodded assent. "So far as it goes, I am on that line, sir. But this is all in the strictest confidence. You understand that, I hope."

Clive held out his hand, smiling. "There's my hand on it. I really appreciate your telling me this very much. I have been worried about the Glennes. It isn't only for Miss Glenne. She is young and strong after all."

"And will probably soon find some one anxious to take care of her, sir," said Cobham slyly.

Clive grinned rather self-consciously. "I mean the father, Colonel Glenne, is in a different position. He's a chronic invalid, and knocking about won't do him any good.—Well, if you have finished, we'll go. I have a man to see, and in the evening you can wait for

me in the foyer at the Princess Theatre. I'll be there sharp eight."

"Thank you, sir," said Cobham; "I'll enjoy that very much. And I'm looking forward to our game of golf to-morrow."

Chapter XXVI

CLIVE GUIDES THE RABBIT

DURING the following day, Clive Merton changed his mind about letting Mary Glenne into the secret.

He had begun by thinking that Superintendent Cobham was a talkative fool, trying to cover up his lack of knowledge by a show of cleverness. Then, when the suicide theory had come up again, he had seen him as the complete fool, unmasked by the statement of his chief constable; now he found it impossible not to be impressed by Cobham's keenness, his logic, and his tenacity. He saw the man as a close reasoner, talkative only when it suited him to be so, as close-mouthed as an oyster when discretion was the card to play.

He realized that his feeling about Cobham a week before was in part compounded of his own inability to see any clew to the mystery, and in part a lingering recollection of the jibes commonly hurled at the provincial police when playing the rôle of detectives.

When he got home after his day at Histable, he sat down and wrote a letter to Mary Glenne. It began as does any letter written to a pretty woman by the man who loves her, and then went on to tell her, under promise of secrecy, of his meeting with Cobham,

and his experience as golf tutor to the superintendent.

"I was rather more of an ass than our good policeman," he wrote, "when I thought him a fool. He is really a very clever fellow, not highly educated, but with a great deal of native wit and quickness, a faculty for putting two and two together, and a manner that appears more confiding than it really is. I must say he has impressed me, and because of that I am in confidence, of course, going to let you into a secret. He did not forbid me to tell you, but suggested that I might hold it over until he was more sure of his facts.

"Actually he is on the track of the money Cupolis swindled us out of. How he got on this line I don't know, but after to-day I am convinced that he knows something, and has the case well in hand. I can't prove this to you by anything he has said or done, but you can't be with him and not feel that he is clapping himself secretly on the back all the time.

"I imagine that he knows who killed Cupolis and got away with the money. The man plays golf. No doubt he is some well-known denizen of the underworld, perhaps a former pal of Cupolis. Of course, you must not count on this absolutely and you must keep it from your father; but I am awfully bucked at the idea we may get some of our own back again.

"Perhaps then you won't feel so diffident about announcing a certain engagement we know of!

"Cobham has turned to thoughts of golf, it seems, and I volunteered to teach him the game. So to-day

we set out for a course at Histable, and a friend of mine, who is a member, came down to play with us, and show us round. I have an idea that Cobham is not so keen on the game as he makes out, but if he is really working up some point in the case in this way, it beats me to guess it. Still, he chose Histable for his first essay, and other little things make me wonder if he is not merely playing at golf with an ulterior motive.

"I must say that, when we started off from the first tee, and during the round we managed to get in before lunch, he did attend to my instructions, and seemed to be quite absorbed in the business of keeping his head still, and driving the ball the way it should go. He is a hefty driver when he does connect, and has a painstaking way on the greens that is rather effective, if ugly. At any rate I saw nothing to suggest that his thoughts were elsewhere, until we returned to the clubhouse for lunch.

"There are not many interesting golf club-houses, and I suppose Histable is as uninteresting as any I ever saw. But old Cobham kept my friend busy showing him round, and pointing out everything, from the bar to the lockers where the members stow their things. I could see my pal was amused at it, but I laid low and said nuffin, as I wasn't sure what C. was up to. At lunch he talked golf till we were full of it. He wanted to know how many members there were and how many were locals; was it more crowded on the links on Saturdays and Sundays; did many people come

from town to play, or was it mostly local members?

"Bob told him all he could. As a matter of fact, not many come from town, as the course is not up to much; too flat and artificial to be interesting. Most of the members are locals, or fellows who live there, but work in the city, and put in a round in the summer evenings or on Saturdays and Sundays, with a few Londoners who have week-end cottages. But here I am in a tangle. I don't think I am dull, but, I put it to you, what can these irrelevant questions have to do with the murder of Cupolis nearly a hundred miles away?

"Then, I wonder, have they anything to do with it, or is C. marking time, marking time while he gets some more evidence through his subordinates in the force. Probably you will think I am an ass to read something subtle into the superintendent's maneuvers, and words won't explain just what he makes me feel. If you have ever seen a water-spaniel sitting up and taking notice because he hears duck coming, when you can neither see nor hear them, you will understand what I mean. Metaphorically I can see Cobham pricking up his ears and looking very alert and satisfied. I hope I am justified in all this speculation. It means something to me if it comes off, and a great deal more to you and your father, not to speak of the professor and the others, who were lured into investing by Cupolis's siren voice.

"Cobham has some business to do to-morrow and the next day, but has asked me to take him out again

on Saturday to play. Meanwhile, though I have put your house in the agents' hands, I shall not consider any offer for it very seriously till I see how the cat jumps. If Cobham does get our money back, you will, I assume, stay where you are, or, at least, not rush to sell."

Superintendent Cobham did not tell Clive that his business took him back to Tendon Mocket. Nor did he inform Captain Shardel of that fact, or even write to Sergeant Allen of the Hindon detective branch. He took a train down when he had left Clive, and arrived very late, descending at a station some four miles short of Tendon Mocket.

So far, it had been an unusually fine and hot summer. The drought had begun at the end of April, carried through May, and only broken that day on the second of June, when the nine guests had traveled down to stay at Tendon Oaks.

The night was fine and warm when Cobham got down, and set out afoot along the country road. There was a moon to give him light, and as he strode along, he pulled cheerfully at his pipe, and hummed between times the melody of "Questo o quella."

He had the keys of the house of Tendon Oaks in his bag, and it was towards the mansion that he was now walking.

He knew that it would be wiser to square the caretaker in residence to keep his mouth shut about this unexpected visit. But that would be easy enough, and

the only doubtful thing in regard to his visit was, to his mind, the likelihood of finding what he was now on his way to look for.

"Those footprints," he mused, as he went along, "had something odd about them. I had that idea from the first. In one way they were too sharp and in another not sharp enough. I had the picture in my mind of the man standing there throwing up the grapnel with the rope attached to it, so my first conclusion was natural enough. I think that was what prevented me from studying the position of the feet a bit closer."

As to the search itself he was hopeful, if doubtful. A search at random, and a search which is incomplete, are never as successful as one in which the searcher covers every inch of ground, even beyond the ordinary scope of his inquiries, and is also looking for some definite object. It is proverbially difficult to find a needle in a bundle of hay, but easier to find the needle you are looking for than to come accidentally on one when you are merely hay-making.

Cobham had brought some sandwiches in his bag and, about two o'clock, he turned into a field, entered a cart-shed and sat down for a light meal. He hummed now more gayly than ever, and had nearly exhausted his repertoire of melodies before he put on another pipe and set out again.

It was just growing light when he climbed over the park wall surrounding the grounds of the mansion and struck across the dew-spangled grass. He passed

three ponds on his way, debated with himself for a few moments at their verge, and then went on to the drive and across to the great door.

No one seemed to be stirring yet. The caretaker, new to this sinecure billet, was making the most of his bed.

But Cobham had an afterthought. He turned away again and went off to inspect the footprints which had given him so much food for thought. The dry weather since that thunderstorm had preserved, more or less, the original footprints, and he spent half an hour over them and in looking up at the ledges above from every angle.

With more extensive evidence in his possession, his contemplation of these souvenirs of a tragic night gave him a new clew to their meaning.

"They're too close—far too close," he murmured as he turned away. "As things stood, that was inevitable, and I don't see that I can blame myself for not jumping to it the last time."

A minute later, and he let himself into the house and stood in the great hall, listening to hear if his entrance had awakened the caretaker or his wife.

But he heard nothing. The servants' apartments were cut off and some distance away. With luck he might have a couple of hours to himself before he was disturbed. He went back and shut the door, then advanced again, opened a door leading into the library

and began a minute search of the room, which even involved climbing up to the top of the book-cases, and inserting a portion of himself into the wide, old-fashioned chimney.

He had searched that and two other rooms, and was about to enter the music room, when he heard feet coming along a passage, and stopped dead. He turned, advanced in the direction from which the sound had come, and found himself confronted by the caretaker, who stopped in the middle of a yawn and gave a cry of alarm.

"It's all right," said Cobham, smiling. "Just paying you an early visit, you know."

The man stared. "But how did you get in, sir?"

"I had the keys, my dear chap. You ought to know that. You were here last time."

"Then you are coming to search again, sir?"

Cobham found two half-crowns and exposed them. "Look here. I haven't come here to search; in fact, I haven't been here at all! Can you remember that?"

The man took the coins and grinned. "I think I can, sir."

"And I hope you'll tell your wife the same," said Cobham. "If any of you let out a squeak about my visit to-day, I'll see that your master hears of it. Just go back where you came from and leave this end of the house to me."

The caretaker understood very well. He could forget a good deal for five shillings, and if he could keep

his wife from hearing that Cobham was in the house, that five shillings would be all his own!

"You can trust me, sir," he said, and withdrew again, to return to the servants' quarters and lock the communicating door.

Cobham took his bag in with him, and when he emerged, very hot and dusty, an hour later, it was much heavier, and gave out a metallic sound when it came by accident into collision with a piece of furniture in the hall.

He had locked the bag, and now left it on a big oak settle that stood near the ingle of the great hall. He went upstairs then and straight to the bedroom which had been occupied by Mr. Cupolis on the night of his death.

As he stood there, he took from his pocket the reproductions of the photographs taken by his expert assistant on the morning after the murder. He studied them in turn, looking up from time to time to compare them with the actual details of the room and its furnishing.

After that he bent and measured the height of the window-sill from the floor, and finally leaned out of the window itself and examined the ledge beneath.

He went next door, into what had been Professor Logard's room, opened the window, climbed out on to the ledge and found that, if the nearer half of the sash of the window next door was closed, he could move along the ledge and make an entry into Mr. Cupolis's room.

"But now for the final test," he said to himself as he got in again; "I'll have to find that fellow and get him to help me with a ladder. Still, I'm not going to ruin the ship now for the sake of a ha'porth of tar. The nicest theories have a way of turning out duds."

Descending the stairs again, he got hold of the caretaker and asked him if he was any good at climbing.

"You see, you are a much lighter man than me," he explained. "It takes some rope to hold my fourteen and a half stone."

"I've often climbed tall trees for a hawk's nest," said the man. "But wouldn't a ladder do, sir?"

Cobham shook his head. "I thought of that at first, but it won't do. I'll give you another half-crown if you carry out my instructions. The first thing is to get a good rope and knot it. Bring it up to me in Mr. Cupolis's bedroom at once."

He was humming again now, and looked strangely restless and excited, in spite of his usual stolidity, when the man had left him to go in search of the rope.

"You're either a damn fool or not a bad imitation of a detective, old man!" he said to himself as he went upstairs. "A few days will tell you which it is!"

Chapter XXVII

THE SWING OF THE ROPE

WHEN the man returned with the rope, Cobham took it from him and gave the end a turn round one leg of the heavy bed.

"That will hold all right," he said. "I'll be putting my weight on it at this end, too, so you needn't be afraid of a tumble."

The caretaker laughed. He was pretty certain the burly superintendent could have held him without the assistance of the bed.

"You want me to lower myself down out of the window; is that it, sir? That's easy."

"Good," said Cobham. He took the other end of the rope, threw it out, and saw that it fell across the marks made on the ledge by the points of the grapnel. "Once you have your legs over the ledge it will be simple. But I want you to climb or lower yourself down slowly. You see, a man coming up would have to take his time."

"But you want me to go down, sir?"

"I said a 'man'; not you. Get on with it now, if you're ready."

The caretaker grinned again, climbed over the window-sill and on to the ledge. Cobham nodded.

"Now, when you alight, I want you to stand steady for a minute or two. Just stay where you land and don't move. Got that? I just want time enough to get downstairs and join you."

The man understood, wriggled his legs clear of the ledge when he had taken a hold on the rope, maneuvered for a few moments with his hands on the ledge and his legs twisted round the knotted rope, then vanished from sight.

Cobham remained steady for a few moments, then he felt the rope in his hands slacken. He dropped it hastily, left the room, ran downstairs and out of the house.

The caretaker was standing as steady as a rock where he had landed after his descent. Cobham signed to him to remain so and ran over.

He whipped out a steel measuring tape, went on his knees and measured the distance of the man's feet from the base of the wall, first from the right and then the left.

"Now shuffle round, facing the other way, but without moving backwards or forwards," he said.

The caretaker, bemused and amused by these proceedings, did as he was told. Cobham repeated his measurements and nodded.

"Dismiss!" he said in a sergeant-major's voice. "Here's your other half-crown, but not a word about this, as I told you."

The man thanked him and disappeared into the

house. Cobham went in for his now heavy bag, left the house once more, slamming the front door behind him.

He had had no sleep that night, but then he did not feel that he needed any. He was eager, strung up to a pitch. He felt that he was going to score in spite of Captain Shardel's capitulation to a theory which he himself had always felt to be a wrong one.

If he could only get hold of Inspector Halte! He knew that Halte was back again. He thought this was one of the mornings when the inspector was off duty. Halte lived some distance outside Hindon, in a cottage by the side of the road.

As he reached the road, he heard the horn of a car. It was coming his way and obviously going to Hindon. He signaled as it drew near and found the driver a traveler going early to Hindon. The back of the car was full of sample bags.

The driver was good-humored and willingly gave him a lift. Cobham did not know him by sight, but that was explained when his companion told him he was new to that district. He set Cobham down at Halte's cottage door, waved his hand cheerily and drove off.

Inspector Halte was in the back garden doing a little work among his flowers. Shirt-sleeved, he did not look imposing, but Cobham had rarely to find fault with his work.

When he saw the superintendent coming along the little path he dropped a tool and stood staring.

"I thought you were away, sir," he said.

Cobham smiled. "So I am, nominally."

Halte smiled too. Like Cobham, he admired Captain Shardel as a man, but regarded him as an amateur in detection.

"I see, sir. You haven't given up yet, if the others have. But come in and have a bit of breakfast. I've had mine, but the missus will get you something in two twos."

Cobham accepted the offer and had a talk with him while he waited for breakfast.

"Unless I'm a fool, Halte," he said, "we are going to get our man after all. If we do, the work you have done in London won't go unnoticed. But no one must know I have been here, for a day or two. It'll spoil all if it gets talked of."

"Is there anything I can tell you, sir?" said Halte.

"Well, you were cut off and I haven't heard the last of your investigations about that money. Did it all go the same way—into foreign currency, I mean?"

Halte nodded. "He took a power of trouble too, sir. I never knew such changing and changing again. All I traced went from one stock or share into another, and ended up in French, Belgian or Italian money, mostly large notes. He must have been at that job privately for months."

Cobham looked pleased. "Good! It will make a pretty packet if the lot went into that, and so it is all the better for us. He may have got foreign scrip as well by dealing with some banker abroad."

Breakfast came in then and Cobham, after a few words with Mrs. Halte, set to work with a good appetite on bacon and eggs, and home-made bread, with a pot of strong tea.

"Now Cupolis was evidently arranging for a bolt," said he, when he had finished his first cup, "but in spite of what was said, he never blued it on the tables at Monte Carlo. So if my ideas work out all right we shall recover some of the money, if not all of it."

Halte stared at him admiringly. "Really, sir? That's good work. I wonder what Captain Shardel will say?"

"He'll say I ought to have told him, but that'll blow over if I pull it off," replied Cobham, grinning. "As it is I shall write him Friday night, telling him I'm getting a warrant for arrest—though, as you know, I don't really want one in this case."

"You've got as far as that, sir?"

"I have. I don't say there mayn't be a slip at the last moment. We all have to reckon on that, which is the reason I am keeping it dark, but I feel pretty sure I'm right."

Halte did not ask questions. He knew that Cobham's geniality had limits.

"Pity I can't help, sir."

"No, you can't, but I have all the help I want—oh, wait a moment. I have always told you fellows that you mustn't take the smallest bit of evidence on trust, no matter how good it seems. Checking results doesn't take long, but it's essential if you want accuracy. Now I got a clew to-day, and if you could slip over in your spare time and check it, I should be obliged."

Inspector Halte opened his eyes. "I thought our fellows had gone over the ground pretty well, sir.—You mean go over to Tendon Oaks?"

"That is just what I do mean," said Cobham, and settled to his breakfast again. When he had finished and lighted a cigarette, he took his bag, unlocked it, and produced a pair of those solid metal boot-trees that are so rarely seen nowadays.

As he set them on the table, Halte stared at them with wonder not unmixed with perplexity.

"How do they work in, sir?"

"You will have to see that. Those prints in the beds are still showing, but a shower of rain will spoil them. The modern broad-welted shoe or boot is proportionately much bigger than the old kind would be. Try these in the foot-prints and see if they fit."

"But no man could put these on his feet!" cried Halte.

"Nobody wants to. Just you do that and wire me at my hotel to tell me the result. Now I must try to

get along and cut across country before it is known I am about."

Halte undertook to do the job as quickly as possible, and the superintendent, after looking up the trains from the station east of Tendon Mocket, set out by various fields and foot paths on his way there. He went fast too, in spite of his lack of sleep and the work he had put in during the past thirty hours.

He slept in the train as it ran towards London, and a two hours' nap freshened him considerably. From the London terminus of his arrival he set out in a taxi for Liverpool Street station and took train again to a village a mile and a half from Histable golf links.

He was now hungry again and had a meal at the Blue Boar in the village before taking the road once more. This time he set off along a leafy lane till he came to a pretty half-timbered cottage that stood back off the road in a little plot of ground surrounded by a strong wattle fence. The curtains were drawn, and it was obviously unoccupied at the moment.

It was, in fact, a week-end cottage, inexpensively furnished, such as is used by city men with a taste for the country.

Cobham surveyed it, looked up and down the deserted lane, walked about and surveyed the neighboring fields to see that he could not be overlooked by any one working there, then pushed open the gate, and entered the garden.

"No locks; nothing to excite curiosity," he said to himself, and began to hum as he strolled round all sides of the cottage, and peered through a crack into an outhouse, which might serve as a garage at need.

The place looked very nice to him. It was just the sort of little retreat he would like to retire to one day.

"Wants water laid on, though, to be up to my idea," he mused during his progress. "I don't mind lamps for light at a pinch, but no wells for me. When I go to a place I want to live in it, not die in it."

This reflection was inspired by the sight of a well with a windlass behind the cottage. The super-structure was old, the bricks broken and mossy. Indeed it seemed to be a relic of a ruder age. But then the superintendent's keen eyes caught sight of something, and he went over and looked hard at the windlass, before he retired to the front garden to see if the well was visible from there.

He saw at once that it was masked by the cottage and the outhouse and there were fields to right and left and behind. He went back to the well-coping, his face beaming with pleasure.

There was a newish rope on the windlass!

Cobham again returned to the front and again reconnoitered. But no one was in sight, so he sprinted back to the well and began hastily to turn the handle of the windlass.

It did not creak. It had been oiled and was in good

working order. As he worked away, the rope came to its end and a bucket appeared. It was full of slimy water.

"Don't tell me he drinks that!" cried Cobham to himself. "An old well, a new rope, and dirty water at the bottom. Now this is a find!"

Chapter XXVIII

"They fit!"

Superintendent Cobham reversed the windlass, allowing the bucket to descend the shaft for a few feet. Then he reflected, started, pulled the bucket back once more, and proceeded to cut a few yards from the end of the rope.

"I don't want to do a particularly silly suicide," he mused as he detached the bucket and went to a small tree near him.

Knotting the short length of rope to a branch about ten feet up, he hung on it to test it, found that it bore his weight safely, and returned to the coping, where he once more attached the bucket to the cut end of the main rope. Then he reversed the windlass until the bucket had drawn all the rope off the cylinder.

Now that everything was ready for his descent, he found that he had forgotten to bring his electric torch with him. But that could not be helped, and he had a box of wax vestas in his pocket, which would burn longer and more brightly than wooden matches.

There was, of course, some risk to be taken, but that was unavoidable. Old shafts like that have more than once proved fatal to those who explored them, on account of the foul air and noxious gases collected in

the depths. Cobham shrugged, put his vestas in a convenient pocket, got his legs over the coping and his hands on the rope and prepared to lower himself down.

As he swung over that dark pit, he had a momentary qualm. Then he braced himself and descended slowly, his legs twined about the rope, until his head was a few feet beneath the level of the ground. He hung there, found and lighted a match with one hand, the box held between his teeth, emery paper outward, and quickly examined the lining of the well.

His first examination gave no results. He paused again, two feet farther down, relieved to find the air breathable and the match burning well. Again he saw nothing to interest him.

He repeated the experiment every two feet or so, until he had descended for about twenty feet. The air was then rather murkier, but he did not experience any painful discomfort.

He took the well to be something like forty feet deep. He must, on that basis, have been still some eighteen feet from the bottom when he came on something that forced from him a little murmur of congratulation.

He had already decided that the well did not provide a supply of drinking water, in spite of the evidence of the new rope. He had guessed at another purpose, while not at all sure he had guessed right. But now he knew, and chuckled!

Just opposite his head the stones of the casing had

been removed, leaving a hole in the side of the well about eighteen inches square. As he stared at it his match went out.

In a moment he had lit another vesta and pushed it forward into the mouth of the hole.

He hung there, staring and gasping. Inside there were four objects that looked like flat boxes done up in waterproof canvas. He did not touch them. The shape, the care taken to keep them from damp, hinted at their purpose. The second vesta burned his fingers and went out, but he never felt the sting.

He began to scramble up quickly, like a man who is in a desperate situation and has no time to lose. When he reached the top he clambered over the coping, threw the cut fragment of rope he had used for testing over a hedge, and bolted. He covered half a mile at a tremendous pace until he found himself in a field and in the lee of a field-roller. There he flung himself breathlessly down and lay like a log for ten minutes, staring up at the hot sky.

After a while he began to hum. He began with "Annie Laurie" and ended with the marching melody of "Colonel Bogey."

Then he got up and hurried to the station and was back in time for dinner at his London hotel.

After dinner he rang up Clive Merton.

"I suppose it's all right about that game of ours to-morrow, sir?" he asked.

He heard Clive laugh. "Of course. I say, you're pretty keen, you know.—When did you get back?"

"I finished my business this afternoon, sir," said Cobham demurely. "By the way, sir, isn't it Colonel Bogey you gentlemen are always trying to beat at golf?"

"That's the gentleman," said Clive. "Why?"

"Because I hope to play Bogey this next time," said Cobham.

Clive did not understand what he meant, but merely laughed. "Come over if you have nothing to do, Cobham. I am having a quiet evening."

"Well, if you don't mind, I will, sir," said Cobham, and rang off.

He was with Clive half an hour later, enjoying a good cigar, and beginning to develop his plans.

"Now, sir," he said, "I told you last time that I might have to call on you sometime to aid the law. It may be sooner than you expect."

Clive started. "Good! What do I do, eh?"

Cobham shrugged. "If my man shows fight it will be up to you to help tackle him. I don't have to teach you how to do that, sir."

"Go low!" said Clive, remembering his rugby days. "Yes, I think I can put down most men if I have a mind to it."

Cobham nodded. "That's the ticket. I don't know if he will have a shooter. He may. We'll have to chance that. What I want to warn you is this. I may

get my chance unexpectedly. It may come when you don't know it is near. But the moment I nod my head sharply twice, be ready to smother him and back me up. I hope I can do it myself, but you never know, for he's an ugly customer."

Clive looked serious. "I know now. You can rely on me. But it might be a help if you could give me a pointer where we are likely to meet him."

Cobham reflected for a little and then agreed. "Very well, sir. I think you are right.—He is a member of the golf club where we are going to play."

"Great Scott!" Clive almost shouted. "So that was why you were so keen on golf. By George, Cobham, you are a deep one! When you play Bogey you ought to give some one a scare!"

Cobham smiled. "I don't think I have done badly this trip, sir."

"By Jove, no! But, I say, what is the fellow coming here for? Have you any idea of that, or is it a secret?"

Cobham shook his head. "If I'm right, he has cached the swag down the shaft of a well at a week-end cottage near here, sir."

"Then you have seen it?"

"No, but I have seen what look like boxes down there, all covered in waterproof canvas, sir."

Clive was much excited now. "But why should he come here?"

"Well, having got the swag, it was his job to see that

no one traced it. Now that the hue and cry has died down, he is moving it, I imagine. Mind you, sir, I may get a nasty jolt yet; only I can't believe I shall. The stuff is put there when the trouble is on, then he begins to move it to the locker at the club-house, and from there, I suspect, he will take it away bit by bit till he is ready to make his bolt."

"So that is why you were asking about the lockers and so on? I began to smell a rat when you were so curious, but for the life of me I couldn't connect that with the crime."

"Well, you know now," said Cobham, puffing amiably.

"If he turns up with a bag, I am going to nab him, and then your turn will come."

He excused himself and left Clive half an hour later and paid a late visit to Scotland Yard. From there he went back to his hotel, to find a telegram awaiting him. It was brief but pregnant.

"They fit!—Halte."

Chapter XXIX

SUPERINTENDENT COBHAM PLAYS BOGEY

CLIVE had just breakfasted and was smoking his cigarette and looking at his morning paper when Cobham arrived.

"Early as usual, superintendent," he said as the other came in. "But I forgot. This is the great day, isn't it? You want to get down at once?"

"If you don't mind, sir," said the other, refusing a cigarette and fidgeting more than was his wont. "We want to be playing, if we can, before our man comes on the ground."

"We'll go round for the car now," said Clive. "Just a moment while I get my cap and our clubs."

They lost no time in getting away, and were soon driving rapidly down to Histable. Clive was excited now; Cobham quiet and serious.

"I may have a wire coming to me, sir," he said after a little. "You don't mind my having asked for it to be addressed to you?"

"Not a bit. You mean a wire to the golf club?"

"Quite, sir. I was going to ask if it could be brought on out to us at the course, if we happened to be playing at the time."

Clive nodded. "That is easily arranged. We'll give

a bob to the caddie master to have it sent out. Do you know what time this man will arrive?"

"I don't, but I shall later."

"If this is all a fake on his part, he may not play at all."

"I think he will, sir. If he kept coming to the club and not playing, it would look odd."

They said very little more during the rest of the drive. The superintendent was incubating his final action, while Clive, though not less excited, was beginning to realize that this might be a serious affair.

He knew that English criminals did not commonly carry firearms, but their use was not unknown, and a man who had committed a murder and robbery might be inclined to employ any means to save himself from arrest.

Of course he had great faith in his companion. Cobham was a man who had arrested a good many in his time, before he had ended up as superintendent of the Hindon force, and probably he would trust more to surprise than to an open attack on his man. Between the two of them at any rate they ought to be able to bottle the ruffian.

Clive had been made an honorary member of the club through the good offices of his local friend, but the friend did not turn up that morning, and a quarter of an hour after they had reached the club-house Clive and Cobham drove off from the first tee.

Six or seven couples had gone on ahead of them, but

the rush would be later in the day, when the city men, released from business, would snatch a hasty lunch and race over for a round.

If Cobham was usually a rabbit, such as a novice generally is, to-day he seemed to have struck an extraordinary streak of luck. He drove like a champion, putted with deadly accuracy, and surprised Clive by reaching the green at the fifth with a drive and a shot with his iron.

"See how the occasion takes us," said Clive, laughing. "It makes me foozle and does you good."

"Duffer's luck, sir," smiled the other. "I daresay I shall make a mess of it from this on."

But he continued to play well, and only muffed a shot at the eleventh hole, when a boy came hurrying from the club-house with a telegram in his hand.

"Ain't one of you gents Mr. Merton?" he inquired.

Cobham grounded his club and bit his lip, nervous for the first time since he had come on the links. Clive Merton went a shade paler, then took the telegram and tipped the boy.

He passed the wire to Cobham, who tore it open, glanced at it, and handed it back.

"He's just left here.—Jimmy."

Cobham looked at his watch, calculated something, and nodded to his companion.

"I think we can finish the round easily, sir, before he gets here, however he comes."

Clive noticed that their caddie was staring at them curiously. He smiled. "Righto! Come along. I have this for a half, I think." Then he added in a low voice: "If you could only arrange for an arrest every time you played, you would be champion in no time!"

Cobham and he went on quietly. Luckily there was no impatient crowd behind them at the time. As they drove off from the tee and walked off towards the next green, Clive asked a low question:

"What is the plan now? Do we meet him on the links, or go back after the round and pick him up."

"I had meant to get him at the club-house, sir, but now I think it is better not. For one thing there will be a good many there and then people get in your way and hamper you if your man makes a bolt. I've known people with the best intentions crowd the police and spoil an arrest."

"Well, you know best," said Clive.

"My idea is this, Mr. Merton. We'll play out this round, and then sit off the fairway, as if we had had enough of it for the time and were resting. This being a common as well as a course, that won't look odd. If, and when, he passes us, we'll follow up and I'll speak to him. Then we'll have to watch out sharp that he doesn't diddle us."

Clive nodded. Cobham was in plus-fours and golf jacket, with a tweed cap, and at a little distance no one would take him for the Hindon police chief.

Now Cobham did not repeat his brilliance of the

early part of the round, and Clive ended two up. They dismissed the caddie and, carrying their own clubs, strolled off to a low bench set on a little elevation to the side of the fairway between the fourth and fifth holes. Turning their backs to that direction and looking the other way, they could see other players who might be finishing a round, without being seen in full face by any one beginning a new one.

"This do?" asked Clive as they settled themselves.

Cobham reflected, then slipped from the low seat and sat on the ground with his back against the bench.

"I'll look smaller this way, sir. You stay where you are and be a foil to me."

They sat and smoked. Rarely they talked. Each was thinking how the minutes dragged, and at the end of an hour Clive felt the perspiration beading his brow.

"I never knew suspense could be so trying," he said in a low voice.

Cobham shrugged. "I remember in my young days, sir, being put to watch a well-known cracksman. I had to huddle down on smelly straw at the back of a store for two hours. It was my first big job, and my heart was beating ten times a second, I thought. I was nearly choked with the smell; I wanted to sneeze, or cough, and when I did take him, I praised heaven he made no fight. If he had, I was too done and cramped to hold him."

"I think it would drive me mad," said Clive.

Another half-hour passed. Two foursomes had gone

by and three couples. But furtive glances at them on Cobham's part proved that the man he wanted was not among them.

Another quarter of an hour dragged on. Then they heard the faint click of a ball and Cobham peeped back.

"Righto, sir!" he said in a whisper.

His whisper fell like the explosion of a bomb on Clive's tense ear. But a word from his companion made him sit tight.

"Steady!"

Clive puffed gustily at his pipe and sat like a rock now. A minute passed, then Cobham rose leisurely.

"He's passed, sir. Come along."

They both rose. Clive's excited eyes swung round on to a tall man who was about to use his mashie.

"Why—why," he whispered, "it's Mand!"

Cobham twitched his sleeve. "Sshsh!"

Chapter XXX

COBHAM FINISHES ONE UP!

MAND was playing a solitary round and did not bestow any attention on the two men who lounged on the seat off the fairway. He had given them a glance as he came opposite, but they were ninety yards off, and he saw that they had bags of clubs propped up beside them on the bench.

He had just reached the green, laid down his bag, and was extracting his putter from it, when he saw that the two men had followed him and swung round to face them.

He was, perhaps, slightly paler after that sight, but he did not show any alarm or any expression save a natural surprise.

"Hallo, hallo!" he said. "I never expected to see you two here."

Cobham's huge strides had taken him near Mand in a couple of moments. "I don't suppose you did, sir," he remarked dryly, his eyes studying Mand's pockets for sign of a hidden weapon. "As a matter of fact, sir, we just came out to ask if you are a relation of the Mr. Mand who lives near here!"

Mand started. "Near here—no! There must be many of my name, but I don't know him. You see,

I rarely play here, though I am a member. I'm too busy since I got that job with Goage."

"Then you don't know him at all, sir?"

"No. But why don't you ask the secretary, superintendent? I tell you what; I'll stay here, and when you have made your inquiries I don't see why we shouldn't have a game together. I notice you have your clubs."

Cobham laid down his bag and rubbed his palms together. The action curiously reminded Clive of a wrestler getting ready for a clinch.

"I think you'll come with us, Mr. Mand," he said sharply. "I have information to the effect that you have a cottage near here—a cottage with a well!"

Clive thought himself a pretty quick man of action, but at this moment Mand surprised even him.

Mand had the putter in his hand still, but the metal head rested on the ground. It was like a flash of lightning the way that club was whirled and slashed at Cobham's neck.

But Cobham was not unused to being attacked and, as Mand's arm swung up, he ducked his head and dashed for his man.

But their criminal had still some resources. As Cobham dashed in, he sidestepped cleverly and took a bound that cleared nine or ten feet. As he landed, he whirled about and bolted.

For a moment Clive had been too surprised to act. But when he saw that the superintendent was unhurt,

he snatched a club from his bag and slung it violently after the flying figure.

Luck more than skill guided the missile. It caught between Mand's legs and he was down in a trice, though he still retained hold of the putter.

Clive and Cobham were on him as he rose to his feet. Clive got a nasty flesh wound on the side of the head from the club as he closed, but Cobham simultaneously tackled their man with a rush that brought them all down in a heap together.

They both realized fully the implications of the phrase "fighting for his life." Mand was naturally a tall, athletic fellow, but now he was a perfect demon. For a minute he held them successfully at bay, kicking, punching, biting, cursing all the time in a snarling voice. Clive got a blow on the shin and a knee in his stomach; the blood was flowing into his eyes from the flesh wound. Cobham was bruised and scratched. Then Clive drew clear, rose to his feet and dived straight on Mand, pinning his upper arms to the ground and holding him there, while Cobham produced his belt and tied Mand's legs together. Together they twisted him over on his face and handcuffed his hands behind his back.

The whole struggle had only occupied four or five minutes and luckily no one had observed it. Between them they set the livid and foaming man on his feet, untied the belt and marched him off towards the club-house.

Now they became the cynosure of curious eyes and half a dozen members came out to see what was up.

Cobham waved them off sternly. "I am a police officer, gentlemen, and have my duty to do. Please get on with your game and leave me to my duty."

"What damn rot!" cried one man. "Why, that's one of our members.—Here, Mand, what is up?"

The livid man glared at the officious member in silence. Cobham began to move Mand on.

"Now then, sir, don't interfere any more, if you please. Come along, Mr. Merton, we'll take him into the club-house."

The golfers moved back a little, talking excitedly among themselves. Clive and Cobham moved on and at last got Mand into the club-house, where the secretary came fussily out to ask them what they were doing.

Cobham explained briefly. "If you will let us take him into the room where the lockers are and ask your members to keep away for a little, I shall be obliged to you," he added.

The secretary bit his lip. "It's most irregular, but if—"

"It's necessary, sir, and I have authority behind me," said Cobham.

"Oh, well—" said the secretary. "Come along."

When they had Mand in the room where the lockers were, and Cobham had turned the key in the door of the room, the prisoner fastened a look of peculiar malevolence on him.

"Now, you damned country muddler," he said, "what is this all about? I knew you would make a mess of it."

Cobham looked him full in the eyes. "I am going to charge you, Vance Mand, with the murder of Mr. Cupolis," he began.

And then he recited the charge and gave the usual warning.

"He committed suicide, and that is all I am going to say about it, you perfect fool!" said Mand.

Cobham approached. "And now I am going to search you," he said.

Had Mand not been handcuffed, he would have put up another fight then and there, but Clive collared and held him, at a sign from the superintendent, while the latter went through his pockets and finally produced a key.

Clive hung on stolidly to the writhing, cursing man, while Cobham approached Mand's locker and unlocked it. Then, withdrawing the key and putting it in his pocket, he bent and produced a mass of papers and two boxes, together with large, sealed bank envelopes.

"Looks like the loot, Mr. Merton," he said, as he slit open an envelope and drew from it a mass of foreign currency.

He replaced the things in the locker and left Clive holding the prisoner until he found the secretary and returned with him.

"Look here, sir," he said to the surprised and anxious

official, "do you recognize this gentleman as a Mr. Vance Mand?"

"I do," said the other nervously, rather quailing under Mand's glare.

"Do you recognize this as the locker assigned to and used by him, sir?"

"I do, of course."

"Thank you, sir. You will be subpenaed later to give evidence as to those facts. We are going now."

He walked across and took Mand by the elbows; Clive released his own grip.

"We'll go back in your car, Mr. Merton," said the superintendent, "and free this gentleman for his own duties. Bring the contents of the locker along with you, please."

"But I can't allow—" began the secretary as Clive went over to the locker.

"By your leave, sir," said Cobham. "Thank you, sir. When we have to effect an arrest, any one who obstructs or hampers us is in danger of trouble! I am sure you wouldn't like that, sir."

Ten minutes later and Clive was driving them back to London in his car. But now one of the superintendent's hands was handcuffed to that of his scowling prisoner.

Chapter XXXI

THE SUPERINTENDENT EXPLAINS

COBHAM had been right when he guessed that his chief constable, Captain Shardel, would forget the little deception he had practiced on him when he heard of the arrest.

Shardel left for London a very few minutes after he had received a wire telling him of Vance Mand's arrest, but before he went he had a laugh with his wife over his subordinate's ruse.

"The cheek of the blighter!" he said to her, grinning in spite of himself. "He throws dust in my eyes with that seaside holiday of his and then pulls off the job by himself."

"But Mr. Mand of all people!" she cried. "I wonder can he be right?"

"That is what I am going to see," said her husband, taking his hat. "He has found some of the goods on the fellow anyway. Jove! This will make a score for us. It's old Cobham's top-note."

Clive Merton had gone home the moment he was able to deliver Cobham and the prisoner at their destination. On his way he sent a wire to Mary Glenne, telling her that some of the money had been recovered, but omitting Mand's name. Later he sat down and

wrote a long letter to her, adding that, unless his evidence was required at once, he would come down as soon as possible.

He had an invitation for that night to a dance in Kensington, but stayed in, under the impression that Cobham would either call or send a message.

At half-past nine, to his surprise, Cobham turned up, accompanied by Captain Shardel. He welcomed them both, got them something to drink, and learned that he would be required to give evidence during the next day. "Have you found the rest of the money yet, superintendent?" he asked, when they had settled down with their cigars.

"Most of it, sir," said Cobham modestly.

"About a hundred and forty thousand," said Shardel, laughing. "Cobham's a cunning old bird, Merton. You can take my word for that! He found the rest of it at Goage's house and down an old well at the back of a week-end cottage Mand had taken seven months ago."

Clive stared admiringly at Cobham. "You're a marvel!" he said. "Great Scott! You have saved most of us. But it beats me how you got at it. Why, there was the grapnel Cupolis bought himself and those footprints."

Cobham looked quietly at Captain Shardel. "As you know, sir, Mr. Merton was a great help to me to-day. He brought Mand down flying, after he had almost taken my head off with a club."

Shardel nodded amiably at Clive.

"Good man! I don't see why Cobham shouldn't let us into the secrets of the prison-house, eh? I am very curious myself to know how you worked it."

Cobham smiled and put his cigar down on an ash-tray. "Well, sir, I suppose most of us get one strong impression or another at the beginning of a case, and it is that that colors our work on it."

"First impressions—no doubt."

"And the ones that really hit you in the eye, so to speak. In this case I was puzzled at once by what struck me as a very odd circumstance, the fact that Mr. Cupolis, knowing he was ruined (for that was the way the case looked to us then), should ask a party of guests down to the house to tell them about it. He knew in any case that it would lead to punishment, and a man who knows that does not plan to walk into it, but to walk away from it. So I started on the case wondering if Mr. Cupolis was really ruined. I also asked myself why, if he wasn't—which meant that he had the stuff hidden and meant to get away with it later—he should tell the guests instead of collecting the boodle and bolting."

"I asked myself that too," said Shardel, "but it led me nowhere."

Cobham smiled faintly. "As you know, sir, I examined the body, I examined the poniard found in the room, and I had the good luck to discover that the poniard had not been used. If it was stained with

blood, it was simply because it had been dropped near the body after death. Now, one of the guests might have had a motive for killing Cupolis, but as the dagger was not used, I did not think a guest had done it. If it was not a guest, it was some one in the house; or a man who came from outside, either to revenge himself for being swindled or because he was a former pal of Cupolis, who had double-crossed him. I kept a pretty open mind about that at first, and then when Sergeant Allen came along with news of the footprints in the flower-beds under the windows, I began to think it had been done by an outsider."

"I was sure of it," said Clive. He passed Captain Shardel the cigar-box and settled himself again.

Superintendent Cobham nodded. "It looked like it, decidedly, and my next move was to find out how the intruder had entered. Obviously, if he had entered, it was by the window. We found marks of what looked like a grapnel on the ledge beneath the window of the room where Cupolis slept on the night of his death, and also that under Mand's window. I then discovered—what I was intended to discover, of course—that Cupolis had sometimes slept in the other room as well. Before I go any further, sir, I may say that those marks on the ledge both puzzled and troubled me. But, being there, and hinting at the use of a grapnel with a rope attached, I took measures to see if such a thing could be found."

"In the ponds?"

"Yes, sir. Every one seems to have an idea that water makes a good hiding-place for compromising materials. It doesn't really, but we'll pass over that."

He paused, reflected for a few moments, and went on.

"If there was an outsider and he got away, it was across the park. I surveyed the area and saw those ponds. I got the men to drag them, and sure enough we pulled up a grapnel, though without a rope. I suppose Mr. Merton here, who saw it, thought I was delighted with this find. I wasn't. It muddled me completely and put my theory in a hopeless tangle."

"May I ask why?" said Clive. "You did not know at that time that Vance Mand was the murderer."

"No, sir, but I said I was not satisfied about the marks on the ledge. You see, there was a little channel cut along the ledge. Now if you throw up a grapnel to one and put your weight gradually on the rope you have attached to it for climbing, the grapnel will slip at first until it settles its hold. In this case the marks were an inch short of the channel. In fact, they would have slipped forward to the channel and stuck there."

"They might not."

"But I had another fact to go on, sir. You take a grapnel like that one, with slightly curved tines, and make a mark with it on a stone ledge. The depth and the direction of the scratches when pulled one way are not quite that when pulled the other way. What had worried me when I saw those scratches first was

the fact that they appeared to have been made by some one leaning out of the window itself and pulling *inwards.*"

"Very ingenious, Cobham," said Shardel. "But you don't suggest that Mand went out later and threw the grapnel into the lake?"

"Not after, sir," said Cobham dryly; "but I'll get on to the footprints now, if you don't mind, and return to the other later. It had been dry for a long time before that night, but those marks on the flower-beds suggested that they had been made in damp soil, therefore during the night of the murder itself. Very well. If the ground was wet then, as we know it was, why didn't we find tracks of some kind leading away from the beds? They would not be as clear or deep on grass, but the rain was tremendous and we would have found some trace. Though I did not see at that time how it was done, I felt a suspicion that the footprints were not those of an intruder, but had been put there to suggest one."

"Good idea," cried Clive.

Cobham beamed. "So that turned my thoughts again to some one in the house, until it struck me, as it has struck Captain Shardel, that the man indoors could hardly have got out to the pond to dispose of the grapnel without running a risk of being seen from the house. Also, if it was the work of Mand, or another inmate, that person was both subtle and ingenious."

"But why should you settle on Mand?" asked Shardel.

"I didn't quite, sir, but I reasoned this way: if Mand was alone in the house at the time of the murder, suspicion might fall on him. By asking all those guests, and by letting them know that they were ruined by Cupolis, he would not only be able to lessen suspicion, but also to provide within reach of Cupolis a number of people who had a motive for wishing to harm the Greek. That theory explained to me why the guests were asked, and why the crash was mentioned in the letter from Cupolis read by Mand in the music room."

Captain Shardel smiled. "You're very lucid on the whole, my dear fellow, but I think you are now confusing Mand with Mr. Cupolis. It was Cupolis, if you remember, who wrote the letter to the guests, and Cupolis who, contrary to his usual custom, personally invited those guests."

Clive expected to see Cobham covered with confusion. Instead, the superintendent only smiled.

"Your thinking so, sir, is only a natural assumption, and one that was mine too at first. If we are told that Cupolis is the master and Mand the secretary, we take it for granted. But we do not know that it was so, except on the word of two swindlers, Cupolis and Mand themselves. Every later step in my investigation tells me that Mand was the chief and the master mind, but reversed rôles with Cupolis for the purposes of the swindle. Every one agrees that Cupolis was fascinat-

ing, voluble, and the complete confidence trickster, but Mand is a man with a splendid education, a deep mind and a brain that we have no proof Cupolis ever possessed. I think the evidence will show that Mand arranged the coup from the start (with Cupolis nominally to share in the profits), but intended in the end to get rid of his confederate, throw all the blame of the fictitious crash on him, and get away with the proceeds in a year or two, when the case was forgotten."

Clive and Shardel looked at each other excitedly and then back at the superintendent. Shardel exclaimed sharply:

"By Jove! It is possible."

Cobham nodded. "Now I had two facts, sir, to weigh against the possibility of an outsider having killed Cupolis. One was the direction of the scratches on the ledge, and the other the lack of footprints or traces leading away from the flower-beds. I got a third clew from the grapnel itself, and Mr. Merton was standing by at the time, though he did not know what I thought."

"I thought you were mad!" said Clive, laughing.

"The clew was this. The drag used by the men brought up a lot of stuff that looked rather like frog spawn. I am not an expert in these things, but it seemed to me that the stuff on the barbed wires we used as a drag was messed up, as if the drag had cut

through it, while the spawn on the grapnel hadn't the same look. Anyway, it gave me a glimpse of a possibility, so I put the grapnel, spawn and all, in a big jar and took it to a fish expert at the British Natural History Museum in London. I was pretty sure by that time the stuff was fish spawn, and I had an idea that roach, of which there were some in the ponds, spawned a bit later than most coarse fish, about the end of May or the beginning of this month."

Shardel and Clive both laughed.

"You seem to be the devil for clews!" said Shardel.

"Well, sir, it paid me, as you will see. I had a report from the scientific gentleman, and he said that it was his opinion that the spawn was roach spawn, that, from its condition and its stage of development, it had been laid on the grapnel or fallen from the fish on it, and not merely dragged up from another spot."

"And what did you make of that, Cobham?"

"A point of time, sir, and a very simple one. If the grapnel had been thrown in there within twelve hours of my finding it, it was unlikely that spawn in that stage of development could have been laid on it—impossible, in fact. And a hatchery expert, who helped me later at the pond, assured me that all the roach in it had spawned some time before. So, if the grapnel was not thrown in the pond the night of Cupolis's murder, or during the early part of the next day, it must have been put there some time *before* the murder!"

Clive gasped. "Simple as sin," he said; "but it would not have occurred to me."

Shardel grinned. "I shall have to resign and make you chief constable. But carry on!"

Cobham smiled modestly. "Now I began to see some light, until I asked myself why that had been thrown into the pond by Mand or any one else. I could understand him buying a grapnel and making marks on the windows that night or before, so that we should think an intruder had climbed up, but why did he not dispose of the grapnel so that we could not find it? If you remember Mr. Mand's conduct from first to last, you will see that he had the kind of art you saw in Mr. Hawtrey on the stage. He had everything figured out to a hair; he had, beyond that, a naturalness that almost took me in. He never tried to deny things that might seem to point to him. He was too clever for that. He even made the marks outside his own window, and then explained them away, so that I felt almost convinced again that he was innocent. In other words, he was prepared to meet not only the dull country investigator he thought me, but also the sharpest Scotland Yard man, if necessary.

"Something that would prove, or seem to prove, the presence of an outsider would be helpful from his point of view. He knows pretty well that the ground is searched thoroughly in a murder case, also that ponds and rivers are dragged in search of a weapon. It was my opinion that he deliberately put the grapnel in

that near pond some time before the murder, with a view to its being found if the pond was dragged."

"Had you any other proof to bear that out?" said Shardel.

Cobham nodded. "It seemed to me that a slight film of oil had been spread over the surface of the grapnel, to prevent it from rusting too soon, sir. I was rather cock-a-hoop about how I had got on, and then I went to town and got that information about Cupolis buying the grapnel himself. It worried me. I nearly went back on my theories, till I sat down and worked them all out again. I had thought Mand might be the chief and Cupolis the real assistant. Taking that for granted, I knew Cupolis would not suspect that Mand had already planned to murder him. If he did not (and he could not know the details in Mand's mind anyhow), I concluded that he had ordered that grapnel at Mand's request, without knowing for what purpose it was required."

Captain Shardel laid down the butt of his cigar. "I said you were a devil for clews, Cobham. I think the house is with you."

"But then, sir, I had a nasty facer when the suicide theory was brought up again, and that press talk seemed to put the lid on my work. I was so keen to go on, and yet I wasn't sure even then that I could make a score. But I felt I wasn't going to be done, so I asked an old police friend of mine, who is now an inquiry agent, if he would keep an eye on Mand, who was

then secretary to Lady Goage. I knew that, even if he did find something suspicious, I still had a long row to hoe, since the weapon with which the murder was committed was still to find. I had already ruled out the dagger. I can only say I believe Professor Logard stole into Cupolis's room in a fit of mental aberration, intending to kill him with a dagger he had sneaked earlier from the trophy, that he found Cupolis dead, and dropped the weapon, afterwards climbing back to his own room. I am sure the mental state he was in the next morning was caused by the shock of that find following on the news of the previous evening."

"I agree with you there."

"Anyway, sir, I was told to lay off, and later I went to Monte Carlo and proved beyond doubt that Cupolis did not lose the investors' money at the tables. But before that it had struck me that there was an old and odd chair in the room Mr. Merton here had occupied at Tendon Oaks. I did not remember seeing it the first time, but I had an idea I had seen it in Mr. Mand's room then. That struck me as odd, especially as it bore finger-prints that corresponded to Mand's. (I got them without his knowing, by the way.) Then I asked him casually once how Mr. Cupolis had got hold of him by talking of his favorite interests, and, he let out, without thinking, that they were music and old furniture. I examined that chair one day very thoroughly, turned it upside down, and then saw that one of the legs had been lately taken out and inserted

again. I smuggled that chair home in the police car and took it to my workshop, where I do a bit of joinery sometimes."

"You find clews in the running brooks, the ponds anyway," said Shardel, "but the chair beats me."

Chapter XXXII

IN THE CHAIR

GOBHAM drew a piece of paper from his pocket and drew two or three rough diagrams, which he handed over to Captain Shardel.

"As you know, sir," he went on, "there are a good many ways of fitting a leg into a chair, the front legs I mean. Dovetailing, a screw, and other things are common. But this particular chair was old, and it seemed to me the leg had a kind of metal dowel or something, and that was held firm by two wedge-shaped pieces. Even then I wouldn't have taken it apart but for the obvious traces of its recent removal. It was only a bit of furniture, and if Mand had not been foolish enough to remove it from his room to the other when he was left in the house, it might have remained only a piece of antique furniture to the middle of next century."

Clive looked interested. "Of course Mand knew that no one would see what you saw at an ordinary glance."

"No, sir, not without turning up the chair and looking for it. Anyway I took it home as I said and took off the leg." He turned to Captain Shardel: "If you will look at the diagram I have numbered three, sir,

you will see by the dotted lines how that metal projection from the leg fitted into the under side of the chair. It was about three and a quarter inches long, shaped roughly like a blunt spear-head, but flattish."

"But could that be the weapon used, Cobham?"

Cobham nodded. "I am speaking of the original thing, sir. When I took it out I saw at once that I was right, for it had been ground on the edges and the point. When Mand returned to his room that night, no doubt, he just wiped it and returned it roughly to its place, wedging it in to finish. Later on, when he had the house to himself, he made a better job of it and glued the wedges."

"Great Scott!" cried Clive. "You're an extraordinary chap, Cobham! As ingenious as Mand."

"Or a bit more so, since he caught Mand out," agreed the chief constable. "But, Cobham, though I quite see your point, and think you have our man on toast now, what about that wiping the blood off the spear thing? Bloodstains are things every murderer fears."

Cobham laughed. "Ah, that came out in the wash, sir. He had a small bit of linen rag, and wiped it with that. But, having fined down the metal, the hole to receive it was a trifle more commodious than before, so he stuffed in the rag to wedge it, and I have that rag safe at Hindon!"

As he paused, the two men regarded him with admiring interest. Both of them had privately to revise their ideas on physiognomy as a guide to mentality, for

Superintendent Cobham looked a much less clever fellow than he had proved himself to be.

"Well," said Shardel after a moment, "I call that damn good work, and I don't think many could better it. What do you think, Merton?"

Clive walked over to Cobham and held out his hand. "I wish I had your brains, Cobham," he said generously, "and I don't forget either that you didn't only score for yourself, but have done a magnificent thing for the investors in Cupolis's schemes."

Cobham flushed up like a girl and replied warmly: "I am as pleased about that as the other thing, thank you, sir," he said, "but I want to tell you the rest—about those footprints."

"Carry on," said Captain Shardel.

"Well, those were the last things to puzzle me, and I only saw light one day in London when I was staring into a bootmaker's and saw a pair of those solid metal boot-trees. Mr. Merton came up at the time and saw them too. But it was a revelation to me, and I went back to Tendon Oaks and studied those footprints in the beds with a great deal better appreciation of what they meant. They had always seemed to me too much alike in their position under the ledges of both windows to be those of a man throwing up a grapnel in the dark more or less at random. And both impressions were not quite what I would have expected to see made by the ordinary welted boot.

"Now, it occurred to me that, when Mand was pre-

paring for the murder, he might have made the prints after the rain by suspending those heavy boot-trees one at a time from a cord, and made the impression by dumping each once on the muddy bed. But I still wished to prove that, though I thought I could get my case even without them. In other words, it was up to me to find the things. And I did!

"Mand was very cunning. When he had used them, no doubt he knew his room and belongings might be searched. He could not afford to have them found there. Even when he left the house he did not wish to take them with him, for, if he were nabbed on the way on suspicion, it was all up with him. But a pair of boot-trees found months after by the owner of the house, if found then at all, would not suggest anything to a layman. So he simply went downstairs and hid them in a dark corner behind that large pipe-organ in the music room. I found them there, and there was still some dry mud on the soles that had not crumbled off in the dry room.

"Yes," continued Cobham, when he had remained silent for a few moments, "Mr. Mand was altogether too natural, if you know what I mean. Most criminals get themselves into danger for being too careless; he was a bit too careful. I've been told by an artist that some of his kind spoil a good picture by working on it over and over till they shut out the wood with the trees. That is what Mand did. As I see it, he gave Cupolis all the prominent work, even the buying of the grapnel

and the converting of the loot into wads of foreign currency. But he was just waiting his time and, knowing that Cupolis was becoming addicted to drugs, he saw that it would be an easy business to polish him off at the right moment. So he made that frame-up with the guests, no doubt told Cupolis that that letter about the crash was only a bluff to get away with the money, then got the man doped and in a sort of comatose state.

"That night he took the leg out of the chair, his weapon all ready on the end of it, and stole into Cupolis's room. The man was lying on the bed, unable to understand what was going on, and Mand lifted him out and stood him up against the window ledge. Cupolis would be under the influence of the dope and Mand could use that weapon without a chance of missing his mark. When that was done, he pushed open the window, to let it be thought that a man from outside had climbed up and stabbed Cupolis, who had dragged himself out of bed to see who had opened the window. After that he just slipped back to his room, replaced the leg of the chair, after wiping the spike with the rag, and got into bed. The rest we know."

"One would almost think you had been there," said Clive.

Cobham smiled. "Anyway, when I had found the weapon I knew that Mand had done the trick and meant to get away with the swag. Meanwhile, my friend the inquiry agent had discovered that Mand

had a Saturday afternoon off at Goage's and went down to Histable with his golf clubs. He then found that Mand had joined the club a good while before and had a week-end cottage, which he rarely used, not far from the course. It was then I got up an interest in golf, and afterwards had the luck to find an old well behind the cottage and a hiding-place down the shaft.

"You see, sir, that return to the suicide theory did me some good after all. Mand thought the hue and cry was over. He knew that Cupolis had been storing the currency in the well for their joint getaway. So he began to remove the stuff from that well to his locker in the club-house, and every time he came down for a game he would bring some of it back to town. He was young and could wait. In the end he would have given notice, or contrived to get himself dismissed, and gone abroad with the swag. That, and his attack on me, will tell, whatever he says in court, not to speak of the possession of the valuables. When I say I am more than glad to have him under lock and key, don't think I am wasting any sympathy on Cupolis. It's generally diamond cut diamond among these rogues, only Mand happened to get in first."

Cobham stopped and Clive poured him a drink. Captain Shardel rose and looked at his watch.

"We'll be getting off, Merton," he said. "We have a busy day ahead of us to-morrow; eh, Cobham?"

Cobham rose too. "We have, sir, and Mr. Merton here. I'll just tell him where and when he'll be

needed, sir, and then come with you. I've had an anxious time with the case, and I'll really be thankful when it is over and done with."

Before a month was ended, Superintendent Cobham got his rest and his holiday, and set off with his triumphant wife to the seaside they had visited for so many years.

It was the end too for Vance Mand; found guilty on the charge of willfully murdering Cupolis in the mansion of Tendon Oaks, on a stormy night in June, and sentenced to death with all due solemnity.

But it was not the end for Clive Merton or Mary Glenne. For them it was the happiest of beginnings.